

# GODS AND MASKS

OF THE KĀTHMĀNDU VALLEY



Anne VERGATI

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AND  
MASKS**

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## Foreword

CULTURAL objects are meant to serve various composite functions in a given society. Categorisation of these objects into 'religious', 'secular', 'artistic', 'social', etc. may be necessary to have a certain academic understanding of a particular cultural trait, such a categorisation has often led to reconstruction of a fragmented picture of the society or its cultural expression. The modern museum and exhibition dominated society as ours is used to displaying cultural objects of 'other' societies as 'art' in one context and publishing lengthy discourses on their artistic merit, and a few months later, the same object is shown in another exhibition where its 'ritual' context is glorified without any comment on the object's artistic merit. James Clifford's observation that "the concrete inventive existence of tribal cultures and artists is suppressed in the process of either constituting authentic, or *traditional* worlds or appreciating their products in the timeless category of *art*" brings to us new understanding of the art-anthropology divide.

We often tend to lose sight of the fact that there are other criteria too — the criteria of the 'insider'. This is not to say that the 'insider' has a 'better' understanding of his/her culture but there can be no doubt that the insider's view can be illuminating as much as the outsider's view can be sharply analytical due to the requisite distance that the outsider has from the culture he/she is studying.





Dr. Anne Vergati's study: "*Gods and Masks of the Kāthmāndu Valley*" has some of the above considerations in the centre and therefore promises to fill a lacunae in our understanding of this category of cultural objects. Masks of the Himalayan region are collected the world over and are hung on the walls of museums and drawing rooms, primarily for their visual appeal and for the romantic charm of the 'messages' they broadcast from a 'strange' world. In museum education programmes, often the 'educator' wears replicas of such masks and dances around in front of a bunch of school children, the main message being how physical metamorphosis occurs due to use of a facial mask. A given society may use the mask for mere transference of one character into another—for impersonation. But there are also contexts in other societies where the spirit of one being 'magically' or 'ritually' enters the others, and that the phenomenon's physical manifestation is depicted by the use of masks and other paraphernalia.

Dr. Vergati in her current study has emphasised this latter aspect of masks. She has studied here the living traditions related to masks rather than their styles and has investigated the relation between the masks, the dancers who wear them and the gods. In contrast with most Western traditions, in the Himalayan regions of India and Nepal, masks are often used in ritual processions rather than in theatrical performances.

Dr. Vergati has unlayered the 'classical', 'tāntric' or regional 'folk' elements in the making





and use of masks and has pointed out differences between the Newari and Tibetan traditions among others. She has spotlighted some of the lesser known mask-dance performances of the Newari Buddhist monasteries — a distinct addition to our knowledge on the subject. Here she has pointed out how the context (of living practices) can become a source of knowledge where text is not available (there are no Newari or Sanskrit texts on ritual dances).

To prove that masks in Nepal are not merely for entertainment but represent deities themselves, Dr. Vergati elaborates the process of making masks and particularly emphasises that like the cultic images, masks are also consecrated.

Another important aspect of Dr. Vergati's study pertains to interaction between the sacred and the profane spaces — 'royal spaces' and 'other localities'. The chapter on "*Masked Dances and the Territory of the Kingdom*" highlights the political significance of mask-dances and brings out the vital ritual links between gods, kings and mask-dancers. "The 'power' to dance and 'life' are obtained when the dancers are consecrated by the royal goddess Taleju, the tutelary goddess of the Malla dynasty."

This comprehensive monograph on "*Gods and Masks of the Kāthmāndu Valley*" is, in many ways, the first of its kind and, therefore, will serve as an important reference book for years to come.

**Jyotindra Jain**



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Fig. 1: Statue mask of Bhairava, sixteenth century, made of gilt repoussé copper with semi precious stones (photo: Musée Guimet, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques, Paris).

## Acknowledgements

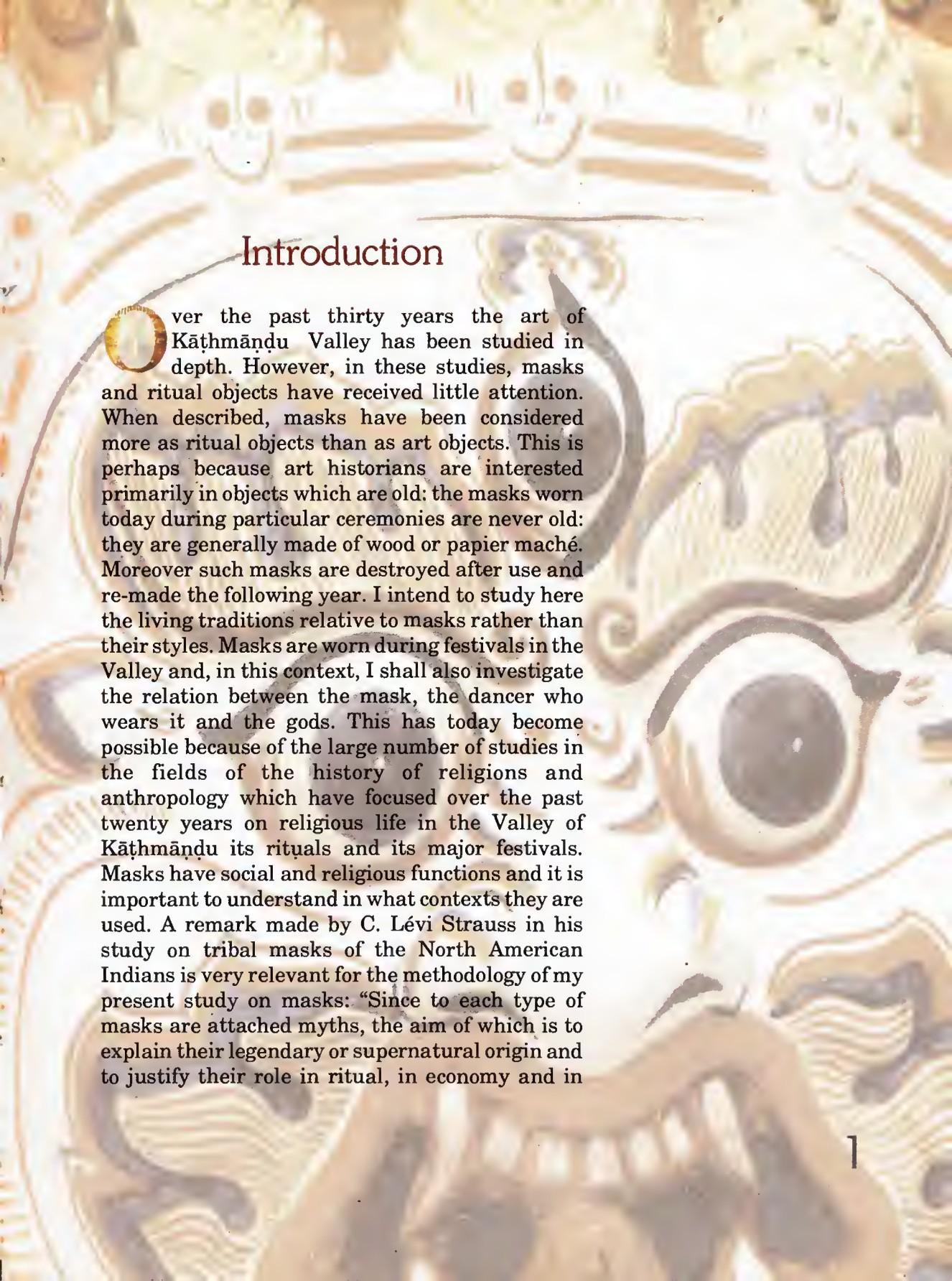
*The Material on which this book is based was collected during field work conducted in Nepal and financed by the Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative of the National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS) and the University of Paris X, Nanterre. Without the support of the Laboratoire in Paris this research would not have been possible. During my stay in Kathmandu Valley I had the opportunity to understand the social and ritual functions of masks in Newari society. I am grateful to all my Newari friends who helped me: it is impossible here to enumerate them all by name.*

*I would also like to thank my colleagues in France: G. Tarabout, G. Fussman, M.L. Reiniche as well as those in India such as Prof. T.N. Madan and Prof. Baidyanath Saraswati who took the time to read and criticise positively my text. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Susheel K. Mittal for his patience and for having accepted this book for publication.*

*Participation in the Conference Men and Masks at IGNCA in New Delhi, in February 1998 opened for me many fresh perspectives and motivated me to study in future the comparative aspects of use of masks: notably the chhau dances of Bihar or the cham dances of Ladakh. I am most grateful to the Cultural Service of the French Embassy, which financed my participation to the conference 'Men and Masks' and particularly to Mr. B. Malauzat.*

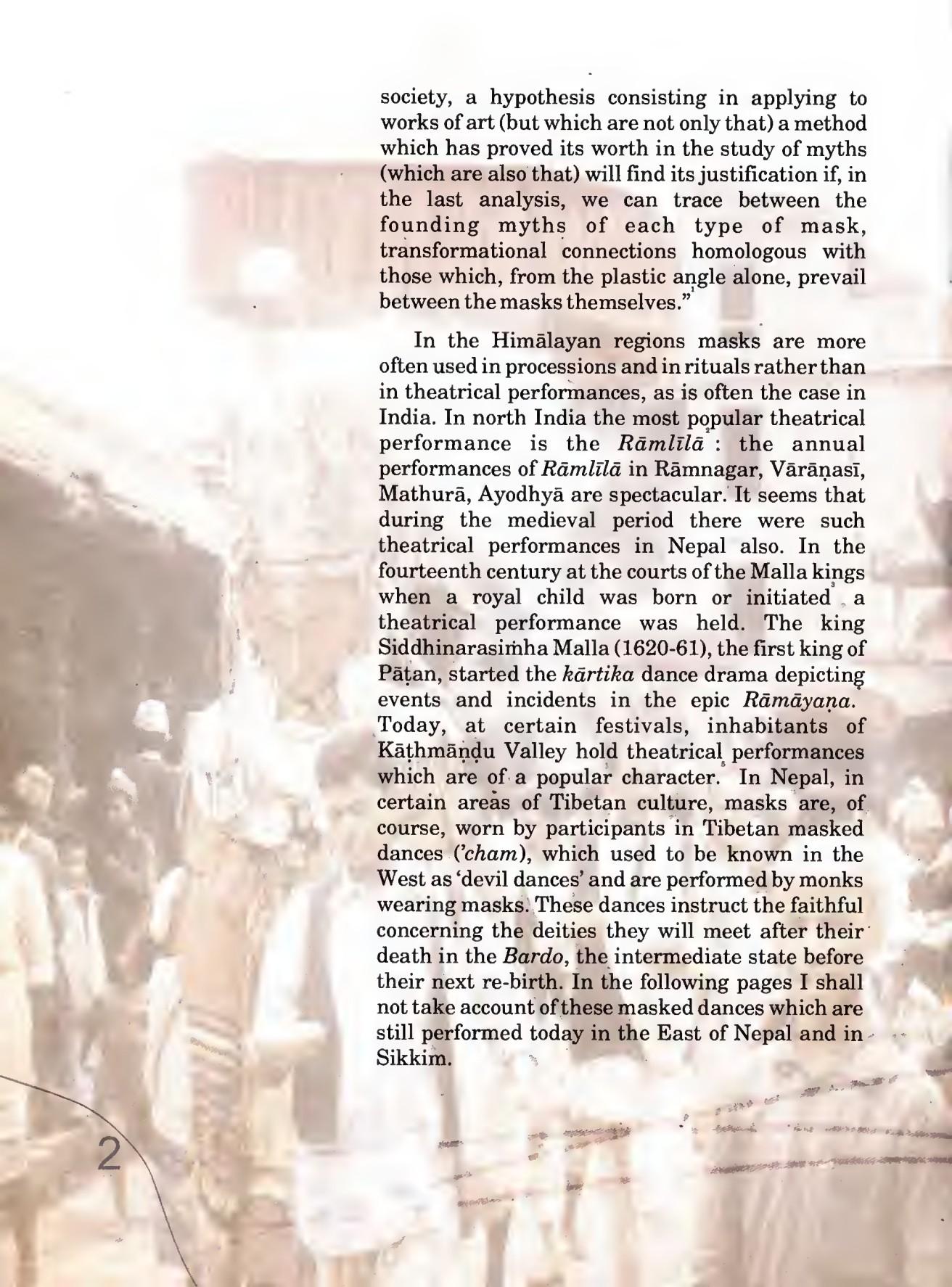
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**Anne VERGATI**



## Introduction

Over the past thirty years the art of Kāthmāndu Valley has been studied in depth. However, in these studies, masks and ritual objects have received little attention. When described, masks have been considered more as ritual objects than as art objects. This is perhaps because art historians are interested primarily in objects which are old; the masks worn today during particular ceremonies are never old: they are generally made of wood or papier maché. Moreover such masks are destroyed after use and re-made the following year. I intend to study here the living traditions relative to masks rather than their styles. Masks are worn during festivals in the Valley and, in this context, I shall also investigate the relation between the mask, the dancer who wears it and the gods. This has today become possible because of the large number of studies in the fields of the history of religions and anthropology which have focused over the past twenty years on religious life in the Valley of Kāthmāndu its rituals and its major festivals. Masks have social and religious functions and it is important to understand in what contexts they are used. A remark made by C. Lévi Strauss in his study on tribal masks of the North American Indians is very relevant for the methodology of my present study on masks: "Since to each type of masks are attached myths, the aim of which is to explain their legendary or supernatural origin and to justify their role in ritual, in economy and in



society, a hypothesis consisting in applying to works of art (but which are not only that) a method which has proved its worth in the study of myths (which are also that) will find its justification if, in the last analysis, we can trace between the founding myths of each type of mask, transformational connections homologous with those which, from the plastic angle alone, prevail between the masks themselves."

In the Himālayan regions masks are more often used in processions and in rituals rather than in theatrical performances, as is often the case in India. In north India the most popular theatrical performance is the *Rāmlīlā*: the annual performances of *Rāmlīlā* in Rāmnagar, Vārāṇasī, Mathurā, Ayodhyā are spectacular. It seems that during the medieval period there were such theatrical performances in Nepal also. In the fourteenth century at the courts of the Malla kings when a royal child was born or initiated a theatrical performance was held. The king Siddhinarasimha Malla (1620-61), the first king of Pātan, started the *kārtika* dance drama depicting events and incidents in the epic *Rāmāyana*. Today, at certain festivals, inhabitants of Kāthmāndu Valley hold theatrical performances which are of a popular character. In Nepal, in certain areas of Tibetan culture, masks are, of course, worn by participants in Tibetan masked dances ('cham'), which used to be known in the West as 'devil dances' and are performed by monks wearing masks. These dances instruct the faithful concerning the deities they will meet after their death in the *Bardo*, the intermediate state before their next re-birth. In the following pages I shall not take account of these masked dances which are still performed today in the East of Nepal and in Sikkim.



The main ethnic group which inhabits the Valley of Kāthmāndu is known by the name of Newar. Until the conquest of the Newar kingdoms of the Valley by the kingdom of Gorkhā in 1768, the term 'Newar' referred simply to all those living in the Valley of Kāthmāndu, then known as 'Nepal'. The Newars share a common language and they have an indigenous written history extending back to the fifth century C.E. For centuries they have created remarkable temples, palaces, and statues which are today well-known all over the world. One particular characteristic of Newar civilization is the coexistence therein, throughout the centuries, of Buddhism and Hinduism, a coexistence which has not always been peaceful. Nepal has always been a Hindu kingdom so the dominant religion has been Hinduism. However alongside deities of the Hindu pantheon, Nepal's Hindu kings used to worship Buddhist deities such as Red Avalokiteśvara (*alias* Matsyendranāth), Harasiddhi, Vajrayoginī, etc.

In the case of Nepal today, one must distinguish between two main sorts of masks: those of ethnic groups such as the Magar, Tharu, Rai, etc., which are usually called 'tribes', and those of the inhabitants of the Valley of Kāthmāndu. The tribal masks have been very little studied. They are usually classified as 'primitive' masks: most of them are made of wood and are of human dimensions. Most such 'primitive' masks, which are today in museums or private collections, are of uncertain origin and their function is not well-known. Previously the word 'folk' was used by art historians to designate such 'masks' in order to distinguish them clearly from 'classical Hindu art'. A similar distinction was made in classifying the gods: 'local gods' were classified as 'folk' gods as opposed to the gods of the 'classical Hindu pantheon'.

'Local gods', once assimilated into the Hindu or Buddhist pantheon, have often two or three names, a local name and a Sanskrit name: this is the case for Red Avalokiteśvara in the town of Pāṭan, one of the former Malla capitals, his Sanskrit name is, for Buddhists, Karuṇāmaya and for Hindus, Matsyendranāth. His local name is Bunga dyo: that is the deity of Bunga, the locality where the statue of the god has to reside throughout six months each year. In the pantheon of the Kāthmāṇḍu Valley the iconography of Red Avalokiteśvara (*alias* Matsyendranāth) is that of a 'folk' god: it has been compared with the iconography of Krṣṇa Jagannāth at Puri in Orissa. Red Avalokiteśvara's iconography does not correspond to that of a *bodhisattva* in the iconographic canons. The statue of Red Avalokiteśvara in Pāṭan, is plastered with clay every year when it is reconsecrated, and in this respect its ritual treatment is similar to that accorded to the Nava Durgā masks worn by dancers in different ceremonies. The bathing and the consecration ceremonies of the statue take place at the start of the annual festival of Red Avalokiteśvara in the months of April or May. "Immediately after the bathing, the image is covered with a cloth and the bathing water is scattered over the crowd as a blessing . . . over the next two weeks the painters clean, replaster and paint the image. According to the tradition thirty-two different kinds of clay are supposed to be brought for this".

Among Himālayan masks, the Newar masks can be classified as 'classical': they represent Hindu and Buddhist gods and goddesses as portrayed according to the norms of Indian iconography and iconometry. Nevertheless Newar masks have distinct features, for instance they differ also from Tibetan Buddhist' masks: they are of human dimensions and their iconography is



Fig. 2: Mask in wood of Batuka Bhairava (private collection, Paris).

different. The Buddhist Newar dance-dramas too are different from the Tibetan dance-dramas practised in monasteries. The dances performed by Newar priests, *vajrācārya*, are secret and are performed inside the Tāntric sanctuary of the monasteries. "After worshipping all the deities of the *mandala* (which takes about three hours), the various priests dance. The main *guru* dressed in white dances as Vajrasattva; his wife is in red as Vajradevi, the assistant in yellow as Manjuvajra, his wife in orange as Kesinivajra; and the others are different Wrathful Ones according to the colour of their costume." It seems even today that in the secret sanctum of Buddhist monasteries masked dances are performed by the Buddhist priests with masks portraying the Buddhist esoteric deities of the *mandala* of Cakrasamvara. The compound name, Cakrasamvara, interpreted as the union of the wheel of the elements suggests the blissful state of perfect wisdom, . . . he bestows all desirable things in accordance with one's wishes." The ritual dances performed in Newar Buddhist monasteries, which are always secret, have been little studied.

A fundamental difference between Newar ritual dances and Tibetan ritual dances ('*cham*) performed in monastic courtyards is that, despite the rich literature on rituals, there seems to be no Newar text in Newari or in Sanskrit concerning the ritual dances of Nava Durgā or the dance demon (*lakhe*). So what we know of the history and performances of these dances in different parts of the Kathmāndu Valley has been put together on the basis of oral tradition.

**Fig. 3: Statue mask of Bhairava in gilt copper with inlaid stones, fifteenth century (private collection, Paris).**



Masks in the Himālayan regions, as in India, always represent gods, goddesses or demons and seemingly never represent the dead or the ancestors: this is in contrast to what occurs in Africa or Oceania. In Africa, masks are often



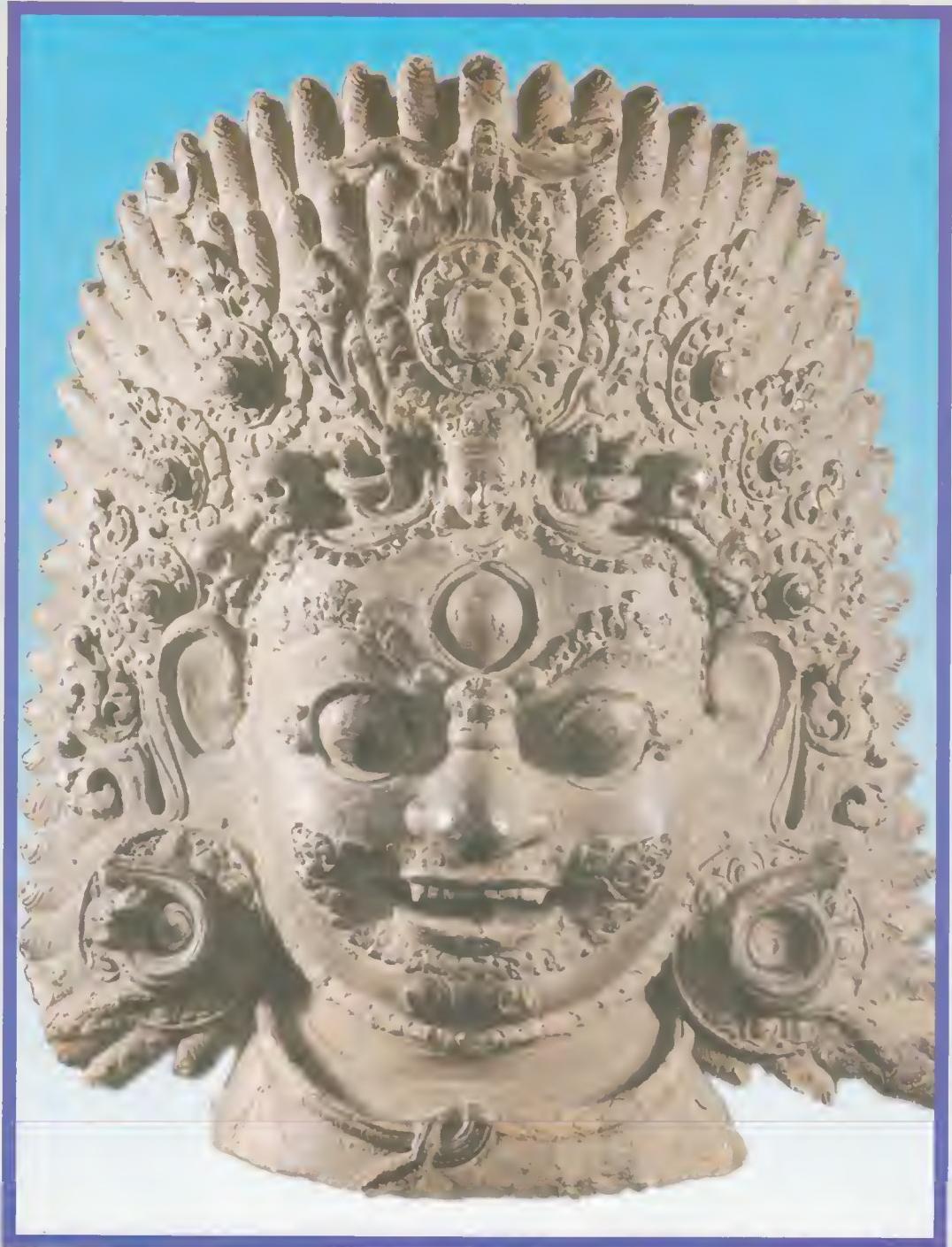


Fig. 4: Statue-mask of Bhairava in “terre cuite” (baked earth), seventeenth century  
(photo: Musée Guimet, Musée National des Arts Asiatiques, Paris).

worn during initiation rituals or funerary rituals. Those worn in initiation ceremonies are often made of vegetable materials such as leaves of trees and are almost formless. The rituals of initiation involve the transformation of an individual as a member of a particular clan or group. There are a considerable number of clan masks: it is thought that the members of a clan are the descendants of a particular ancestor who is often an animal: a buffalo, a snake, etc.<sup>12</sup> Some of the anthropologists who have written about the masks used the expression “society of masks” which refers to all the initiated men who wear masks on different rituals. In the context of Hinduism or Buddhism where the *rituals of passage*, the *samskāra* are important for the construction of the social person, masks are never worn. We have to distinguish among the large category of Himālayan masks three categories: first, masks representing faces of gods which are worn by human beings, a second category, masks which serve as ornamental motifs for decorating a temple, a chariot during a procession, a fountain or a vase used as a ritual object. A third category includes masks in brass or in stone representing also the face of a god and which are worshipped like statues: examples of this are Ākāśa Bhairava, in Bhaktapur, and the god Indra, in Kāthmāndu. We can call this category statue-masks. These masks have the function of representing, in a shortened form, so to speak, the whole body of a god. R.A. Stein has drawn attention to the fact that at the monastery of Samye, in Tibet, masks were venerated alongside statues. These masks represented in Buddhism the Protectors of the Religion. Such masks, like the mediums, facilitated the manifestation of deities.<sup>13</sup> Although the Tibetan language has separate words for designating a statue, the word for mask (*bag*, or *dra'-bag*) designates both a statue or an image.

These different iconographic forms of a same god lead us to reflect on the general manner in which Hinduism represents the bodies of gods and goddesses. Whilst in Vedism the gods were aniconic later on in the first millennium, in Hinduism the images of the gods multiplied exceedingly. These images are primarily anthropomorphic, wear ornaments, are often clad in rich clothes, and each god has its particular attributes. In the Purāṇa, sacred texts written at the beginning of the Christian era, teaching begins to be given concerning the worship of such images. These texts indicate, firstly, the method for making a statue, for installing it in a temple, for bathing it, perfuming it, dressing it and consecrating it. "In these instructions there is no preoccupation with art. It is a question of showing, for practical purposes, how one should represent Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, the countless personages of the Hindu pantheon with their attributes, their robes, the motifs associated with them 'the protective deities' and other accessories."

A wooden statue will become a god only after the rituals of its consecration have been performed. Another commentary is essential: 'the body of the god is composite', it is constructed by rituals and is, in a certain sense, made from these rituals. Before worshipping a statue or an image it must be animated by rites which consecrate it: daily rituals are necessary for re-charging its power and efficacy. The masks are images of the gods and they have the same consecration rituals as statues. I shall discuss this point later on in the chapter dealing with the ritual making of the masks.

### References

1. C. Lévi Strauss, 1979, p. 19.

2. J. Pani, 1986, p. 25.
3. A. Kapur, 1990.  
L. Petech, 1984, p.145: "From the religious point of view, he shared the devotion of most of his contemporaries for Rāma. At the birth of his first son JayadharmaMalla in 487 he caused a drama on Rama's deeds to be played. Another play, the *Bāla-Rāmāyaṇa* (of Rājaśekhara?) was performed on the occasion of JayadharmaMalla's initiation ceremony in 497."
4. D.R. Regmi, 1966, p. 279.
5. G. Toffin, 1982, pp. 93-96.
6. F. Pannier, 1989. *See also* Alsop, I, 1993.
7. Eschmann, 1978, 85-112 has studied for Orissa the Hinduisations of local gods.
8. J.K. Locke, 1980, p. 264.
9. D. Gellner, 1992, p. 275: mentions the dances of the various priests during the Tantric initiation. *See also* J. Locke, 1980, pp. 243-80.
10. D. Snellgrove, 1987, p. 153; p. 154 he gives the description of the *mandala* of Cakrasamvara.
11. M. Griaule, *Les masques dogons*, Paris, 1938. Travaux et Mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie, XXXIII. *See also* G. Le Moal, *Les Bobo. Nature et Fonction des masques*. Paris, ORSTOM, 1980.
12. A. Adler, 1998, p. 171. *See also* J. Mack, 1995, p.17. "In Africa one of the richest masking traditions is that of the Chokwe, a people centred in northern Angola who have spread into Zaire and into parts of Zambia. . . . The Chokwe display masks principally in the course of circumcision rites and the masked figure is one of the leading subjects of Chokwe sculpture."
13. R.A. Stein, *La Civilisation tibétaine*, p. 166.
14. R.A. Stein, 1960, pp. 42-43.

15. L. Renou, *L'Inde fondamentale*, 1978, pp.158-159.  
Ch. Malamoud, 1986, pp. 80-81.
16. L. Renou, 1978, p. 159.
17. Ch. Malamoud, 1986, p. 89: "Texts sometimes highlight the analogy between such and such an offering (or rather between the name it bears) and the part of the body which it serves to constitute."

## The Hindu and Buddhist Pantheon of Kathmandu Valley

A SHORT description of the pantheon of the Kāthmāṇḍu Valley is pertinent for understanding the iconography of the masks and their function during the ritual dances. We find in Nepal the major gods of the Hindu pantheon. However a certain number of local legends has transformed their iconography and the context of their worship.

In the Hinduism of present-day Nepal, the god Viṣṇu plays a major role. According to the inscriptions, the god Viṣṇu has been associated with kingship since the fifth century. The kings of Nepal claim to be incarnations of Viṣṇu. A large number of temples bear witness to the popularity of his worship. The royal temple of Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa in the Darbar Square in Kāthmāṇḍu is decorated with different forms of incarnations (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu who is portrayed in the company of his wife Lakṣmī or Śrī, the goddess of richness and prosperity. The latter goddess is considered at the same time as the king's spouse. In the ideology of Indian kingship, the kingdom, or its extent, is also considered as the goddess Śrī or Lakṣmī. Temples dedicated to Viṣṇu in human form, Nārāyaṇa, are to be found also at Bhaktapur, a former royal town, situated in the east of the Valley, and at Pāṭan too,

south-east of Kāthmāṇḍu, the third royal town. Vaiṣṇavaite temples can be recognized from the symbols on their pillars, with the attributes such as the disc (*cakra*) and the conch (*śaṅkha*). In most temples, Viṣṇu's mount, Garuḍa, is figured with a human face and body but also with wings. The struts which support the roof of the temples have different iconographical representations of Viṣṇu. Three of his incarnations (*avatāra*) are particularly popular: first, the god Viṣṇu is represented as a boar (*varāha*), lifting the earth out of the depths of the ocean in which it had been held by a demon, Hiranyākṣa; secondly, he is depicted with a lion-head, Narasiṁha, and the body of a man; and, in a third *avatāra*, Vāmana, he is represented as making three strides: one on the earth, one in heaven and one on the head of the demon Bali. These incarnations illustrate the particular divine role of Viṣṇu which is to restore traditional law and order (*dharma*) and destroy demons who threaten the order of this world.

In contrast to northern India, the Rāma-*avatāra* is in Nepal of minor importance. Only around Hanumān, the monkey god, Rāma's faithful acolyte who helps him in his struggle against the demon Rāvaṇa, has developed a particular cult. Like Bhairava, he protects the entrance to temples and palaces. In Nepal, the most famous statue of Hanumān is the one installed, during the reign of Pratāpa Malla, at the gate of the Kāthmāṇḍu Royal Palace, in order to keep away evil spirits and epidemics. In Nepal, Brahmā, the creator, the other great god of the Hindu triad, is not the object of any cult such as he receives exceptionally in north India, at Pushkar in Rajasthan.

The most popular god is Śiva, often called Mahādev or Mahādeo, the third god of the Hindu triad. In his aspect of Paśupati, lord of animals,

Fig. 5: Mask of Indra  
Kathmandu, fifteenth century (?),  
we can assume that this  
mask was attached to a  
processional chariot (Collection  
François Pannier, Paris). →



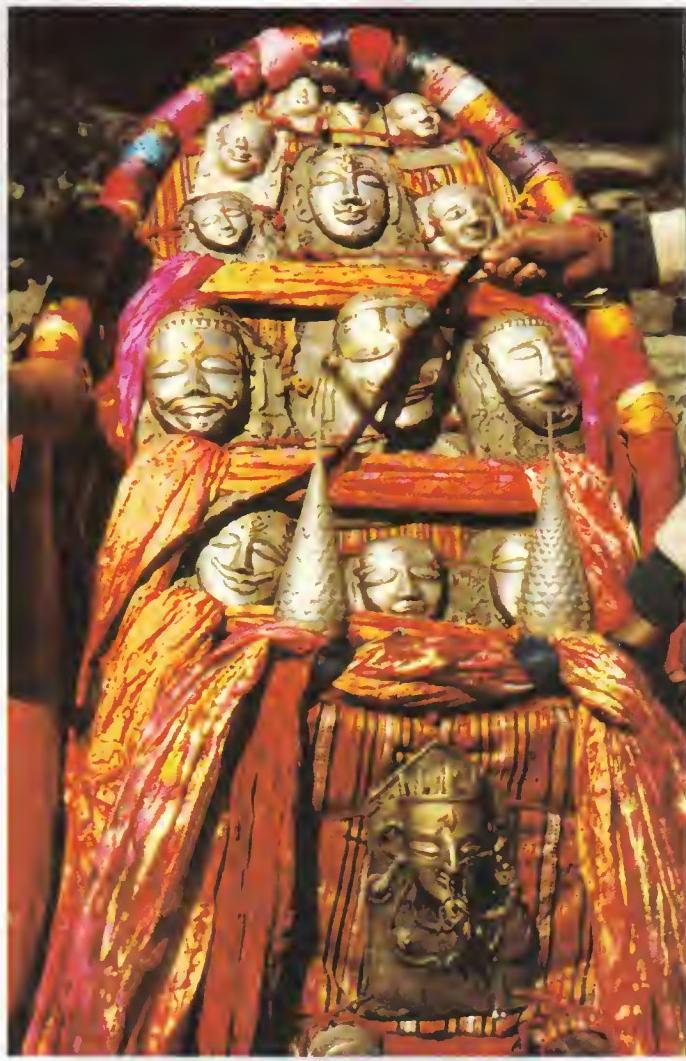


Fig. 6: The ratha of goddess Hidimba in village Manali, Himachal Pradesh (photo: H. Diserens).

Śiva was worshipped from the fifth century onwards. The temple of Paśupatināth in Kāthmāṇḍu Valley remains the most important Hindu temple of the kingdom. It is also an important place of pilgrimage known throughout the Indian subcontinent. During the festival of Śivarātri, at the end of the month of February, many ascetics and pilgrims from all over India come to the shrine of Paśupatināth in order to worship the *linga* and to have a bath in the river Bagmati, which is regarded as the Nepalese equivalent of the Ganges. The *linga* standing inside the shrine has four faces. For a Hindu Newar, a pilgrimage around the holy places of the Valley, begins and ends with a visit to the temple of Paśupatināth.

Śiva is associated with war and, in his terrible form of Bhairava, he is the master of

demons and malevolent spirits. “The demonism and density of Śiva’s entourage, which throbbed with the invisible and varied texture of feeling alive, was tinged with grotesque and lugubrious hues. Others, the *bhūtas*, *rākṣasa* and ghosts, belonged to more dangerous categories. Śiva preferred to stay with them in cremation grounds. . . .” “The anger of Śiva was a creative part of his *samādhi*. From his anger demons came forth and joined the ranks of those who had fallen into the netherworld.” Bhairava, the terrifying aspect

of Śiva, is represented frequently by Hindus as well as by Buddhists. Mahākāla, the great black one, is the epithet of Bhairava used by Buddhists and a statue of Mahākāla stands often at the main entrance of a monastery. He is indeed one of the most venerated protective deities in Nepal. He receives offerings of blood, meat and alcohol. "Many Nepali Bhairava belong to a specific locality and they have evolved from folk deities that owe little allegiance to the broader Hindu tradition." Bhairava can be represented as a statue or simply by a ferocious mask or even a simple aniconic stone; he is closely associated with Mother Goddesses. The classical texts enumerate sixty-four different Bhairavas, grouped by eight with a leader. Each is the companion of a terrifying female counterpart, a *yoginī*. The names of some forms of textual Bhairava such as Unmatta and Vaṭuka Bhairava are well-known in Nepal.

"The rival of Vishnu, Shiva is the patron of classical drama. It is he that Kalidasa and Harsha (with the exception of the *Nagananda*) and Shudraka and Bhavabhuti invoke at the beginning of their works. The god at once terrible and beneficent which the Vedic hymn of the Shatarudriya extols as the patron of carpenters, of plough-makers, and of coachmen and potters and of so many other corporations, was also the natural protector of the comedians. It is he who invented the violent dance, the *tandava*, while his companion Pārvatī created the light and tender steps of the *lasya*; he is the king of the mimics, *nateśvara*, the great mime, *mahanata*: he likes dramatic shows. He laughs, sings delightfully and plays several instruments." This excellent description of Śiva's multiple roles as master of the Dance and of Music helps to explain his connection with masked dances and in particular with those of Nava-Durgā.

The goddess Pārvatī, Śiva's wife, can also have multiple forms. She has many names such as Durgā, Devī, Kālī, Bhagavatī, Umā, Vatsalā, etc. A great number of temples and sculptures are dedicated to her. As a goddess of victory, she is worshipped as Durgā, in particular in her role of slaying the demon buffalo, Mahiśasura. She is represented on wood carvings with sixteen or eighteen arms: her right foot rests on her mount, which is usually a lion, and her left foot treads on the demon buffalo. In Nepal she is associated with the notion of *sakti*, the divine energy and power which stimulates the god. One of her most popular forms is Guhyeśvarī : this name evokes her aspect of 'mistress of the secret' (*guhya*). "Under the name of Guheshvari, Our Lady of the secret, she is the ancient patroness of Nepal. Manjushri discovered her and venerated her, hidden in the root of the lotus which bore Svayambhunath yet manifested in the limpid spring coming out of the ground. . . . The Brahmins, who do not admit the story about Manjushri, have nevertheless a reason for worshipping the goddess at the same place. When Devi, in a previous existence, was the daughter of Daksha her father slighted shamefully Shiva, her husband; the goddess, offended in her love and her dignity, killed herself, while vowing to be reborn with better parents; she then became the daughter of Himalaya." The couple Śiva and Pārvatī (or Umā-Maheśvara) are frequently depicted in stone sculptures. They are figured with their two children Ganeśa and Skanda (or Kumāra) and Śiva's mount, the bull Nandī, and often too with Gaṅgā, the personification of the Ganges which is believed to have its source on mount Kailāsa. Ganeśa, the elephant-headed god, 'Lord of the herds' and remover of obstacles (*vighna vināyaka*), the god of beginnings, is worshipped at the start of every ritual by Hindus as well as by Buddhists. He is always invoked before worshipping other gods:

medieval manuscripts or paintings also start with an invocation to the god Ganeśa.

Stone images of the goddess Bhagavatī or Devī dating from the Licchavi period (fifth to eighth centuries) prove that her worship has been constant for centuries. As Śiva's spouse she can display multiple aspects: either peaceful, when she participates in the exploits of her husband or terrible, demoniacal, when she fights against



Fig. 7: The *ratha* of Goddess Hidimba after the procession.  
Manali, Himachal Pradesh, 1986 (photo: H. Diserens).

demons. Texts which recount her exploits, especially the *Devī Māhātmya*, *The Glorification of the Goddess* have been very popular in Nepal since the thirteenth century. In her terrible aspect, she is also known as Kālī, 'the Black', or Mahākālī, 'The Great Black one': her hands are red with blood and she inspires terror. In the Valley of Kāthmāṇḍu, Kālī has four principal forms: Guhya Kālī, Vatsalā Mahā Kālī, Dakṣiṇā Kālī and Kaliṅga Sthānana. The sanctuary of Dakṣiṇā Kālī which is situated in the south-west of the Valley is famous for the blood sacrifices offered there in honour of the goddess.

Known as mother goddesses, *aṣṭa māṭrakā*, the eight emanations of Śiva's spouse, Pārvatī, in the form of the goddess Tripurasundarī, play an important role in the religious organisation of different localities of the Valley. Each goddess has her own vehicle and her own iconographic attributes, each has a different form of Bhairava as her consort. These goddesses are the guardians of the town limits and are associated with the cardinal directions. At Bhaktapur their temples are to be found around the town at the four cardinal and four intermediate directions:

<i>Goddess</i>	<i>Cardinal directions</i>	<i>Colour</i>	<i>Bhairava</i>
Brahmāṇī	East	Yellow	Aśitāṅga
Māheśvarī	South-East	White	Kalaṅka
Kumārī	South	Red	Krodha
Vaiṣṇavī	South-West	Green	Unmatta
Vārāhī	West	Red	Pracanḍa
Indrāṇī	North-West	Orange	Ruruk
Cāmuṇḍā	North	Red	Kapāla
Mahālakṣmī	North-East	Red	Sambāra.

In the centre of the eight goddesses is situated the goddess Tripurasundarī: the temple of this goddess

is considered to be the religious centre of Bhaktapur. Thus the town of Bhaktapur is conceived of, ideally, as a *mandala* in the form of a lotus: it is divided into nine parts, each part being designated by the name of a goddess.

This group of goddesses associated with the cardinal directions differs from the group known as Nava-Durgā, the Nine-Durgā. This other group of Nine Goddesses includes the demoniacal form of goddesses with whom are associated Gaṇeśa, Śiva, Bhairava, and Seto Bhairava as well as a lion and a tiger Sima and Duma, who are guardian-deities. In fact, twelve masks are worn by a group of dancers who belong to the caste of gardeners, *Gāthā* or *Mālī* and incarnate the deities. They do not wear the mask of Śiva but they carry it, along with the representation of the goddess Mahālakṣmī, who is considered to be the most powerful goddess of the group. She has a singular

Fig. 8: Statue-masks of the eight goddesses with Gaṇeśa displayed in an open sanctuary (*pīṭha*) (photo: A. Vergati).





Fig. 9: The goddess Hidimba adorned with jewels for the procession. She wears the wedding jewels of a young local woman (photo: H. Diserens).

appearance as a very small *yantra* which is also carried by the dancers. Her image is attached to a small chariot carried by the group and it is decorated with the 'oleander plant'. In Kāthmāṇdu she is represented by a small mask which is carried on a stick ahead of the masked dancers. The group of Aṣṭamāṭr̥kā and Navadurgā goddesses have the same names. Perhaps the most significant difference is that the goddesses of the Aṣṭamāṭr̥kā group have statues in bronze or in wood whereas the Navadurgā are represented by masks. The Nava Durgā masks are the moving aspects: they perform in the streets of the towns and also outside the town. They represent the demoniacal form of the Goddesses.

There are two temples dedicated to the Nava-Durgā, in the Valley of Kāthmāṇdu: one is at Theco, a village situated to the south of the town of Pātan; the other is at Bhaktapur, in the eastern

part of the town. The temples are situated inside the locality. At Bhaktapur, masks representing the gods and goddesses are kept on the first storey of the temple. Masked dances are one of the basic elements in the worship of the group of Navā-Durgā.

Since the fourteenth century, the royal power of the Malla dynasty and more recently that of the Shah dynasty was dependent on the goddess Taleju, a goddess who was brought, according to oral tradition, from India by the prince Harisimha Deva at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Taleju is a form of Durgā; her *mantra* is believed to ensure to the king his power and authority. In each of the main towns of the Valley, Kāthmāndu, Pātan, Bhaktapur, former capitals of kingdoms, the temple of the goddess Taleju was built inside the Royal Palace complex. The most ancient of these temples is that of Bhaktapur; the temple in Kāthmāndu was built in the sixteenth century when the Valley was divided into three kingdoms; and the temple in Pātan dates from the seventeenth century. On the tympan (*torana*) of the entrance gate of the Bhaktapur temple, the goddess Taleju is represented as Durgā killing the buffalo demon, Mahiśasura. Often for Taleju, the honorific epithet 'Bhagavatī' is used. At Bhaktapur the royal temple of the goddess Taleju was considered as the political centre of the town. Her worship and her image are secret and must not be revealed to foreigners and persons who have not taken the Tantric initiation. The statue of the goddess Taleju, which is kept on the first floor of the temple, is never taken out in procession. If the temple of Tripurasundarī is the religious centre of the town of Bhaktapur the temple of Taleju is its political centre.

The cult of the so-called living goddess, Kumārī, is spread throughout the Valley. At the festival of



the goddess, Dasaim, young girls are worshiped, as is done also in North India. The Royal Kumārīs in Bhaktapur, in Kāthmāṇdu and in Pātan are chosen from the caste of Buddhist priests, the *vajrācārya*. “Buddhists worship them as the supreme manifestation of their secret Tantric goddess, Vajra Vārāhī, while high caste Hindus worship them as Hindu tantric goddesses”.<sup>10</sup> The living goddess Kumārī is closely connected to the royal goddess Taleju. Some interpret the living goddess Kumārī as the visible form of Taleju. At Kāthmāṇdu she carries the sword which is kept inside the temple of the goddess Taleju and she goes to make offerings in the temple of that goddess at royal festivals such as Dasaim and *Indra Jātrā*.<sup>11</sup> In Kāthmāṇdu during the festival of *Indra Jātrā* the Royal Kumārī has a special chariot festival of her own. She circumambulates the town along with two boys who represent Gaṇeśa and Bhairava. Since the seventeenth century, her worship has become very important for the power of the king depends on the blessing (*tikā*) given to him annually by this living goddess on the occasion of the festival of Dasaim in the month of September.

Most of the gods and goddesses we have mentioned above are represented in the form of statues (*mūrti*) generally made of bronze. As in India, there is a mobile form of the statue which is taken out in procession at festival times while the immobile form remains inside the temple. For instance, the statues of the mother goddesses are taken out in procession in all the towns of the Valley during Dasaim (or *Dussehrā* in north India), the big festival of the Goddess in the autumn. The same goddesses are also often represented in the form of face-masks crowned by a diadem (*mukuta*) which identifies them. These images are placed at the windows of different temples or sanctuaries. For instance there is a temple which houses the



Fig. 10: The Goddess Hidimba, Dhungri, Manali, Kullu valley (photo: H. Diserens).

group of the eight goddesses with masks carved in wood at the windows, situated at Panauti, in the east of the Valley.

The god Śiva too is often represented by a head. The cult of Bhairava, the terrible form of Śiva, is very popular in the Valley where he is figured in the form of a face with big red eyes, like a demon. These so-called masks of Bhairava are in metal or in wood but they are never worn. Often such masks decorate processional chariots (*ratha*), water fountains and temples: they are what we have called ornamental masks.

There are several temples dedicated to Ākāśa Bhairava, 'the terrifying one of the sky' who is represented in gilt copper, the most important of his temples being those of Kāthmāṇḍu and Bhaktapur. The construction of the temple at Bhaktapur dates from the fifteenth century. Ākāśa Bhairava is the main personage in the town's festival, called *Bisket Jātrā*, which takes place in the month of April. According to oral tradition, Śiva in the form of Ākāśa Bhairava, came from Benares to Bhaktapur:

Śiva had come from Benares to Bhaktapur to watch the festival of the goddess Bhadrakali (or Vaishnavi). Nobody recognised him: but the goddess Bhadrakali told her faithful that Śiva was in town in human form, that she wanted to keep him in the town, and that he should therefore be caught: he could be recognised through the fact that he was a head taller than anyone else. When people tried to lay hands on him, Akasha Bhairava sought refuge underground: but his head remained above ground level. It was cut off and that is why, today, Akasha Bhairava is represented in the form of a head without a body.

Fig. 11: Statue mask of Śiva, eighteenth century (photo: F. Pannier). →





The Vedic god Indra, king of the gods and Lord of the atmosphere, was reduced in India to a figurehead charged with the guardianship of the eastern quadrant of the universe. However, in Nepal he receives a special cult and he is the patron of the town of Kāthmāṇḍu. The festival which takes place there in his honour lasts for eleven days. There are a great number of statues from the Malla period representing him as a king, crowned and seated in a position of royal ease (*mahārājalilā*). During the festival in Kāthmāṇḍu, he is represented also in the form of a mask in bronze, with a crested crown and with outstretched arms, which is displayed in different places. According to local oral tradition, Indra was caught by the inhabitants of the Valley as he was stealing a heavenly flower. The inhabitants caught him and as a punishment they pilloried him with his arms outstretched<sup>14</sup> and tied him to a pole. Indra's mother requested the king to release the 'thief' who was the god Indra, a request which was ultimately granted. Later on, Indra became the patron of the town and was carried in a procession around the town of Kāthmāṇḍu. The festival of *Indra Jātrā* starts with the erection of a big pole at Hanumān Dhoka, the Royal Palace in Kāthmāṇḍu. This is similar to what occurs at Bhaktapur for Ākāśa Bhairava during the festival of *Bisket Jātrā*. For the pole-raising ceremony on the morning of the twelfth day, hundreds of people wait in the surrounding temples. When the long banner of Indra's flag displaying the moon and the sun is shown on the pole called *Indradhvaja*, lit. 'the Banner of Indra', the crowd is enthusiastic and people start to make offerings of sweets and flowers. At the foot of the pole is placed a small prison-like cage containing an image of Indra with a golden elephant, the mount of the King of the Gods. Images of Indra with outstretched arms are placed along the streets in different parts of the



**Fig. 12: The statue mask of White Bhairava (Śveta Bhairava) in the Hall of Hanuman Dhoka, the old Royal Palace, Kathmandu. The statue is covered, throughout the year, with lattice which is removed during the *Indra Jātrā* festival (Photo: Suzanne Held).**

town. "The Capucine monks of the eighteenth century who visited the Valley thought they were in presence of Christ on the Cross, travestied."<sup>15</sup> Images and statues of other gods are displayed at that time in front of their temples.

During the festival of *Indra Jātrā* several masked dances figuring gods and demons are performed. These dances are performed every day of the festival: one example is the dance of the demon *lakhe*. The *lakhe* dancers dress in voluminous robes for a very colourful dance which takes place in the daytime. Very often they have swords in their hands. In another group of demons, Sava Bhaku, a dancer wearing a mask of Bhairava with two other dancers who are his attendants, dance each night: I shall describe the masked dances during *Indra Jātrā* later on. The festival of *Indra Jātrā* seems to be essentially a festival linked to the agricultural cycle: the god Indra presides over the festival in his role as the dispenser of summer rains. However this festival has also another aspect: most of the inhabitants honour those of their relatives who died during the past year. A lot of women go round the city placing dishes containing burning wicks at certain points. A road inside the town is prepared and a number of masks of Bhairava are put alongside this road. The oral tradition says that:

Indra's mother, in compensation for her son's release, promised to furnish the Valley with the vital fog and dew during the autumn and winter seasons, moisture which the farmers still refer to as milk for their ripening harvests. She further agreed to lead back to Heaven the souls of all who had died during the year. However, as she left the valley, followed by a long procession of souls each clinging to the clothing of the one ahead the line broke and the spirits fell

Fig. 13: Statue of Bhairava in wood, Kathmandu (Photo: Suzanne Held). →





Fig. 14: Statue mask of Bhairava, called Ākāśa Bhairava, at Indrachowk (Photo: Suzanne Held).

into Indra *daha*, a lake on a hilltop eight miles west of Kāthmāṇdu. Strangely, Indra's mother continued on to her heavenly abode, leaving the people to mourn for the souls of their dead, a rite which has become a traditional part of Indra *jātrā*.

The festival of the living goddess, Kumārī coincides with the festival of Indra in Kāthmāṇdu. The main feature of the Kumārī festival is the pulling of the processional chariot through different parts of the town. This festival is observed mainly in Kāthmāṇdu: but processions of Kumārī take place also in Pātan and Bhaktapur. The king's association with this festival has given it a national character. The boy who represents Bhairava is not just the person who conducts the chariot but is also the

bodyguard of the Kumārī. Only once the king has paid homage to the goddess can the procession start.

In the Valley of Kāthmāṇdu, Buddhism co-exists with Hinduism. Since the fourth century, inscriptions mention the presence of several Buddhist monasteries in the Valley. Statues of the Buddha Śākyamuni representing him both standing and seated appeared in the Valley from the sixth century onwards. Their iconography and

style are similar to those of sculptures from India of the same period. In later Buddhism, representation of the sole historical Buddha gives way to images of a pentad of five Buddhas whose power radiates throughout time and space. The five Buddhas, called also five Tathāgatas, are represented in human form: each has his own colour, his special gesture (*mudrā*) and symbols. Each is represented at a different cardinal point. The central figure of the pentad is no longer Buddha Śākyamuni but Vairocana whose name means Resplendent (or Brilliant). Vairocana is surrounded at each of the cardinal points by Akṣobhya (East), Ratnasambhava (South), Amitābha (West) and Amoghasiddhi (North). Eventually in the Vajrayāna a sixth personage, Vajrasattva, was added to the pentad as the supreme absolute; he englobes the other five. Later, the five Buddhas became five protective deities. The group of five Buddhas is often painted on the covers of manuscripts or in religious paintings (*paubhas*). Sometimes the four or five Buddha are shown with their consorts, five female goddesses. "For the understanding of modern Newar Buddhism two stages in this history are particularly important: first the emergence of the five Buddhas and, second, the appearance of the



**Fig. 15: Statue-mask in wood the goddess Kaumāri from a temple (photo: A. Vergati).**

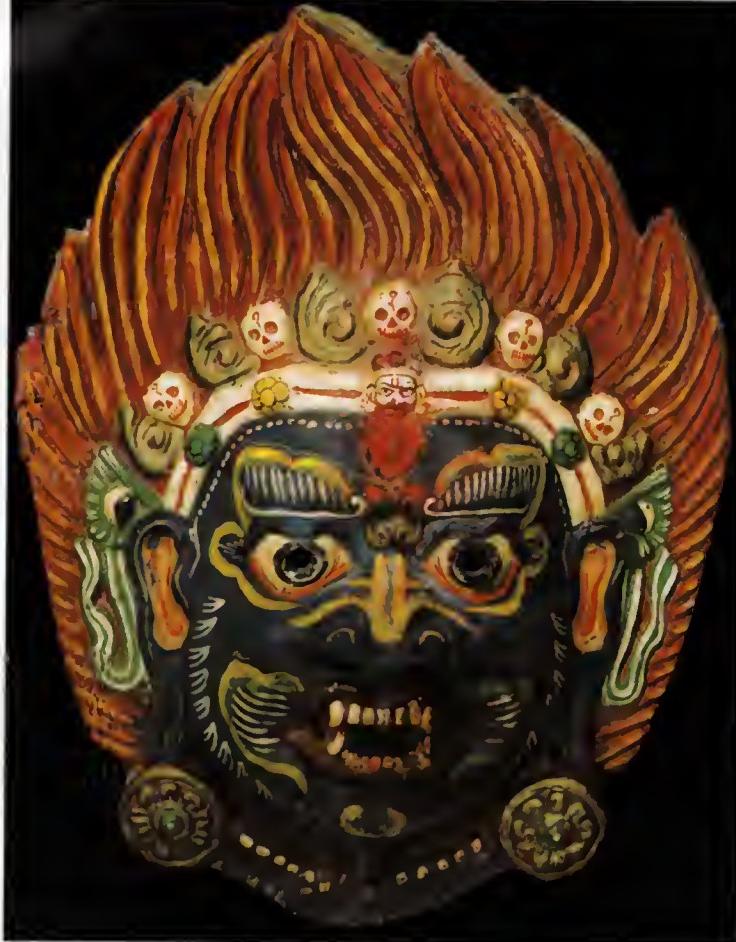


Fig. 16: Mask of Mahākāla in papier maché (photo: A. Vergati).

esoteric deities such as Cakrasamvara".<sup>17</sup> These esoteric deities such as Cakrasamvara, Hevajra, Yogambara, have often a fierce appearance and are worshipped with their consort or *yogini*. They make explicit references to sexual rituals. Their cult is secret and only initiated Buddhists can see their images. Cakrasamvara was particularly popular among Newar Buddhists: there are a great number of paintings which show the popularity of this deity.<sup>18</sup>

Mahāyāna Buddhism postulated the existence of certain very meritorious beings who had become *bodhisattva*. The most popular *bodhisattva* in Nepal is Avalokiteśvara. He is regarded as the *bodhisattva* who can rescue his devotees from danger. In his diverse esoteric forms Avalokiteśvara has multiple arms holding various attributes and sometimes has multiple heads. In Tibet, he is believed to be the protector of that country and the Dalai Lama is his incarnation. In Nepal, in the form of Red Avalokiteśvara (or Red Matsyendranāth or Karuṇāmaya) he is worshiped as a royal god who dispenses rain. As we have mentioned earlier, his statue is reconsecrated every year; it is plastered with mud and then repainted. The iconography of this statue is completely different from that of other Buddhist statues: the face and the body are those of a 'folk'

god. Perhaps his iconography can be explained by the fact that he was brought to Nepal by humans in contrast to images of major deities which have been miraculously discovered usually with the help of gods.<sup>19</sup> For instance, according to the oral tradition, the famous Krṣṇa temple on the Durbar Square in Pāṭan houses Krṣṇa because Viṣṇu appeared in a dream to king Siddhinarasimhamalla (1619-1661) who was at that time building the temple to house lord Śiva. “Vishnu informed the sleeping king where an image of Krishna could be disinterred from the ground near his palace and told him the image should occupy the temple in Shiva’s stead.”<sup>20</sup> A big festival in honour of Red Avalokiteśvara takes place every year in the month of April-May in Kāthmāndu and in Pāṭan: for one month a procession with a chariot takes place within the limits of the town.

Other major deities, such as Svayambhūnāth are self-existent deities (*svayambhū*). This deity appeared as a flame emanating from a lotus that floated on the primordial lake. The *bodhisattva* Mañjuśrī, the creator of the Valley, arrived from the East, from Mahācīna which in this context signifies a mythical country rather than “Great China”. He cleaved the mountains of the Valley in order to set free the water of the lake that previously covered the Valley. His attribute is a sword which he holds in

Fig. 17: Dancer wearing mask of Mahākāla (photo: A. Vergati).





**Fig. 18:** Statue mask of Bhairava in metal which decorates the chariot of the living goddess Kumārī, at Kathmandu (photo: Suzanne Held).

**Fig. 19:** The chariot of the living goddess Kumārī with the statue mask of Mahākāla (photo: Suzanne Held). →

his right hand, ready to cleave the darkness of ignorance.

In more recent Buddhism, the Buddha of the past, Buddha Dīpañkara, is the object of a special cult. There is a triad formed by Śākyamuni (the historical Buddha), Dīpañkara (the Buddha of the Past) and Maitreya (the Buddha of the Future). This triad is called 'the Buddhas of the three Times'. Their three statues, usually kept inside the monasteries, are exhibited during the month of August, in the Buddhist monasteries of Pātan.<sup>21</sup> This previous Buddha, Dīpañkara (literally 'Light Maker') is one of the earlier set of six previous Buddhas. In Nepal, Dīpañkara is associated with the virtues of Buddhist alms-giving. A ceremony of alms-giving takes place every year in different towns of the Valley. In all types of alms-giving, the main donations

take the form of husked rice or boiled rice or sometimes of a gift of money. "The cult brings the supremely Buddhist act of alms-giving to the monastic community into association with a previous Buddha. Alms are offered to Dīpañkara in imitation of Buddha Shakyamuni himself in one of his previous lives. The implication is therefore that the ordinary devotee of today is also, by giving alms, setting out on the path to complete enlightenment as a Buddha". The Buddha





Fig. 20: A dancer wearing the mask of Rakta Gaṇeśa = Red. Gaṇeśa (photo: A. Vergati).

Dīpaṅkara is taken out in procession every year in the month of August; he is represented by a huge mask in *papier maché* and his body is an effigy in wood, dressed in colourful clothes. These images, like the masks of the goddesses, have to be re consecrated every year: the rituals of re consecration are held in the Tantric shrine of the monastery. Buddha Dīpaṅkara is also represented by statues in bronze : the statues are from the seventeenth century, the late Malla period. This manner of representing Buddha Dīpankara is unusual and raises not only the specific problem of the relation between the mask and the effigy but also the more general one of how a god's body is represented.

The act of representing a god in the form of a face is not specific to the Valley of Kāthmāṇḍu alone. Such representations are frequent in the Indian Himālayas, at Kulu and in Himachal Pradesh. In these areas as in Nepal, the statue masks of gods and goddesses such as Hiḍimbā Devī, a demoniacal form of the Goddess, are taken out in procession at the festival of the goddess, *Dussehrā*, in the month of September-October.

Gods and goddesses (*devatās*) are represented in the form of masks in bronze called *mohrā*. These generally represent faces of gods but the word 'face' can lead to confusion. Morphologically and technically they never were intended to serve as

facial masks. "Most of them were small, their average height ranges from about five to twenty centimetres and, further, none were provided with apertures for the eyes and breathing".<sup>24</sup> In Himachal Pradesh, as in Nepal, such statue masks which represent deities, are never worn. They are images which are worshiped; their use is analogous to that of divine statues reduced to their divine heads (or faces).<sup>25</sup> In reality, the statue-masks are not just faces or heads but rather busts. They are of various dimensions, according to the region. The metals used for making them are 'noble' metals: silver or an alloy of brass—and they are executed by the technique known as *cire perdue* or embossed metals. On the metal sheets the head of the god is represented in marked relief and is decorated with jewels. Most of the *mohrās* have been identified with Śiva Mahādeva or his wife Pārvatī or Umādevī or a *nāga*. "Local traditions also identify the *mohras* with *r̥sis* and hero (*viras*) who could indeed be deified figures of local chieftains."<sup>26</sup> These masks are different from the decorative masks to be found outside certain houses, or more frequently, on many fountains.

It is very difficult to identify the divinities in question represented by statue-masks by studying their iconographical details. What distinguishes one from another is their gender: gods can be distinguished from goddesses. All the deities are



Fig. 21: Vajrapāni, protector of the Buddha Dharma, terrifies the enemies with his dreadful face, bared teeth and his angry glare (photo: A. Vergati).



Fig. 22: Details of the *ratha* of the goddess Hidimba at Dhungri temple, Manali, Kullu valley (photo: H. Diserens).

taken out in procession on a palanquin (*ratha*) during different festivals. A statue-mask is never taken out alone for a procession; for the annual procession, there is a group of deities on the chariot (*ratha*). A very precise chronological classification of these statue-masks (*mohrā*) is given in the book of M. Postel where it is argued that the most ancient are from the sixth century AD. His analysis concerns masks from the Sutlej Valley. The illustrations in this book are extremely rich and styles and periods can be distinguished. I want particularly to draw attention to the fact that these statue-masks (*mohrā*) are taken out at the festivals in groups and not individually. For instance several masks are grouped together around a central figure on a chariot (*ratha*) so one is led to

ask oneself whether their disposition reflects a relationship between the masks displayed. One can also raise the question of what relationship exists between the deities represented? As in Nepal, the statue-masks, which are always in a group, are kept, when they are not worshipped, in a wooden box inside the temple : there is a group of masks representing gods just as in the case of the eight goddesses of Nepal which are kept in a sanctuary.

It has been suggested that in Himachal

Fig. 23: The dancer representing the demon Savo Bhaku during *Indra Jātrā* at Kathmandu (photo: Suzanne Held).





Fig. 24: Statue-mask of the god Śiva, Himachal Pradesh (photo: H. Diserens).

Pradesh some of these masks (*mohrās*) are the portraits of kings or patrons or deified heroes. Masks sometimes carry inscriptions of the name of the king (or a Rājpūt hero) who commanded the making of the statue-mask, but there is no certainty in such attributions. In Nepal, there is no cult of deified heroes as there is in other parts of north India. Most of the statues in stone are of kings and donors and most of them are of the late Malla period (sixteenth-seventeenth century) but these personages are never figured as masks. Usually the kings are represented on the summit of columns and the donors, as in the case of the well-known temple of Cangu Nārayāṇa, at ground level as free standing images.



Fig. 25: Statue mask of Bhairava, called Ākāśa Bhairava, at Indrachowk, Kathmandu, displayed on the street in front of his temple during the festival of Indra *jātrā* (photo: Suzanne Held).

## References

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8. N. Gutschow, 1996, p. 209-214
9. G. Toffin, 1984, p. 468.
10. M. Hutt, 1994, p. 48.
11. M. Allen, 1975.
12. G. Toffin, 1984, p. 474.
13. A. Vergati, 1995, p. 177.
14. M. Slusser Shepherd, 1982, p. 268.
15. S. Lévi. 1905, vol. II, p. 53.
16. M. Anderson, 1971, p.128. *See also* M. Slusser Shepherd, 1982, p. 268. G. Singh Nepali, 1966, p. 361.
17. D. Gellner, 1992, p. 251.
18. P. Pal, 1985, p. 31.
19. O. McCoy, 1995, p. 211-12.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
21. A. Vergati, 1982, p. 23.
22. D. Gellner, 1992, p. 186.

23. D. Vidal, p. 96.
24. M. Postel, 1985, p. 179.
25. F. Frontisi-Ducroux, 1995, pp. 22-25. For Ancient Greece there are a considerable number of masks of Dionysus called 'worship masks'.
26. M. Postel, 1985, p. 181.
27. M. Postel, 1985.
28. M. Postel, 1985, p. 327 see the figure with the legend "Devatas of Karjan village being put to sleep at the conclusion of a fair".
29. M. Postel, 1985, p. 227, fig. 363: "Siddha Pal as Vishnu amongst other possible god-kings of Kullu".  
*See also* figs. 364 and 366.



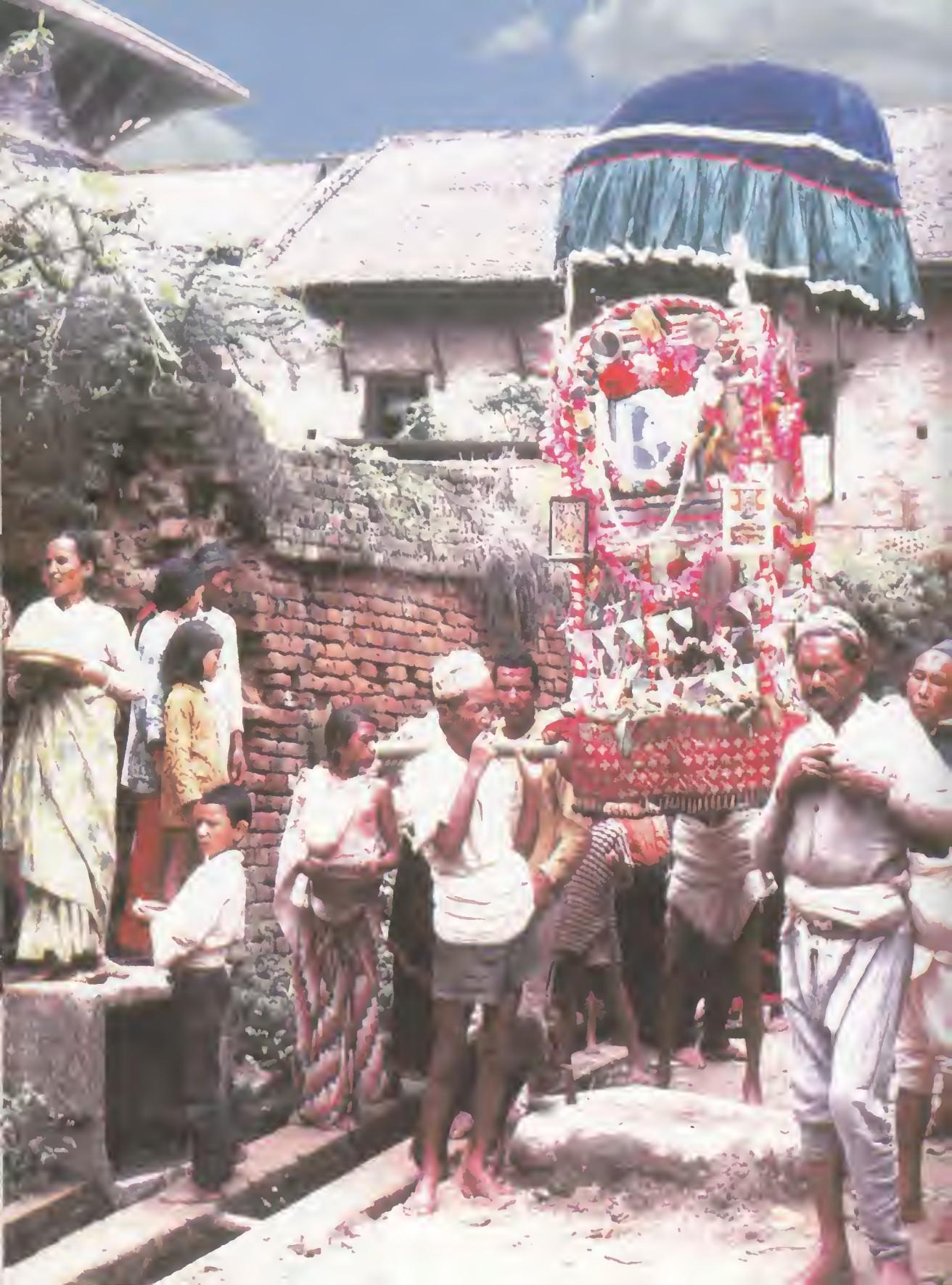
## Gods, Masks and Ancestors

**I**N Hinduism and Buddhism the absence of masks or images of the dead and of ancestors can be explained when we examine the funerary rituals. The dead are incinerated and the diverse ceremonies which precede and which follow the cremation have as objective the expulsion of the corpse out of the house and out of the locality and also the transformation of the deceased into an ancestor. Ashes from the funeral pyre will be scattered in the river at a holy place, generally a pilgrimage centre. For the members of a lineage (the degree of pollution is function of kinship links) a corpse is a major source of impurity as are the house and the belongings of the dead person. It is believed that, seven days after the cremation, the spirit of the dead — the *preta* — continues to haunt the house. The rites carried out on the seventh day and the offerings of food oblige the spirit of the dead to leave the house and the locality. In contemporary Hinduism as in ancient Brahmanism the cremation of the deceased is accompanied by the radical effacement of his personal characteristics.

There is no tomb, no shrine, which could perpetuate the memory of the dead:

The physical space attributed to human remains is nonexistent. The 'life span' of the departed is short. Worship which is

Fig. 26: Festival of *Gai Jātrā* (cow festival) in Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).



addressed to them does not aim at giving them or allowing them to retain a countenance.

Rather than memorial monuments or objects it is people themselves who, by performing rituals for the dead, preserve their memory. I would add that the ancestors beyond the seventh generation do not retain any social identity: they belong to an amorphous group; the members of a lineage do not know in depth the genealogies of the lineage to which they belong. Usually they know the names of their ancestors only up to the third or fourth generation. Only the priests of the places where the ashes are sent for immersion after cremation keep precise records. "Ancestors regularly lapse into disuse, so to speak, to the extent that they follow one another on the endless belt of generations at a rhythm which is the same for everyone."

The ancestors — *pitr* — up to the third generation belong to a clearly defined lineage. As individuals they receive offerings from their descendants. The most important ceremony to the deceased ancestors of the lineage is the annual offering of *śrāddha*. The ranks of ancestors who are worshiped during the daily *pūjā* are the father, the grandfather and the great grandfather.

Each clan, and, within each clan, each lineage has a founding ancestor who is both a historical and a mythical personage. Worship is not done to the founding ancestor of the clan or of the lineage, but to the clan's goddess or god. It is this deity which establishes the unity of the clan's members: usually in each house is kept an image of the clan's goddess or god. The Newar Buddhists replace the concept of heaven with the idea of *nirvāṇa* but their death rituals are parallel to Hindu rituals. Among Newars the essential difference between



Fig. 27: Festival of *Gai Jātrā* in Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).

Buddhists and Hindus is in the way of performing the death rituals. "The Newar Buddhists' rite of Ancestor Worship is performed less often, but is longer and more elaborate than the Hindu rite on which it is based; it includes worship of the Three Jewels and also tantric offerings (meat, alcohol) excluded from the Hindu rite."

Yama, the lord of Hells, the king of the dead, is often represented in Nepalese paintings: his face is red, his aspect is fierce, his look is gloomy; and he holds a chastising staff in one hand and a noose in the other. He is also known as *dharmarāja*, the king of the *dharma*, the king of the cosmic and social order, of the system which makes things and beings interact and hold together so as to constitute one world. Yama judges the dead: he restores the *dharma* by chastising those who could harm him by their transgressions. Yama reigns not just over the dead in general but in particular over those who have been subjected to funerary rites. "The necessity which he imposes on the survivors to carry out their duty towards the dead is, in itself, one of those fundamental constraints which constitute the law." In Nepal, a person who dies of natural death is believed to go straight to the court of Yama. The *ātman*, often translated by 'soul', of the deceased person can enter this heaven only on particular dates in the month of *Bhādrapada* (August-September). In the month of August every year a big festival is held called cow festival (Newari, *sa paru* or *gāi jātrā* in Nepali): it is said that for two days the doors of Yama's abode are kept open for dead persons so that they can then enter. The cow can help the wandering spirits of the dead who had died during the previous year to cross the terrifying river *Vaitaranī* into Yama's realm. The cow is able to push open one of the doors of Yama's abode with its horns, while the other door is believed to be opened later, on the

thirteenth day of the dark half of the month of *Bhādrapada* (August-September). Today similar rituals are performed in Banaras. The ritual *Vṛṣotsarga* (literally “bull sacrifice”) which is performed on the eleventh day after the death, helps the deceased’s soul on its journey to the “Abode of the Ancestors”. It must cross the terrifying Vaitaraṇī river, flowing with blood and other foul substances. The chief mourner holds the tail of a cow given during the ritual. In India, such rituals are known in the Purāṇic texts as *vṛṣotsarga*.

The most spectacular cow festival takes place in Bhaktapur in the month of August; it is a commemoration of death and consists of a procession around the town. Many Newars and other Nepalese from other localities of the Valley come to Bhaktapur to watch the festival. This procession with its musicians, dancers, and masquerades is like a carnival. An effigy in the shape of a cow is carried by each group during the procession. This effigy can be long or short, the long ones ‘represent’ adults who died during the year and the short ones children. Other details of their decoration can indicate if the dead were male or female. Each effigy is composed of a long pole which has on the top the head-mask of a cow. These effigies can be quite heavy and are carried usually by a representative of the lineage. Sometimes there is only a cow-head mask which is carried in a basket. When a death has occurred during the previous year, the young boys of the families concerned wear paper caps on which are depicted cow’s horns and go through the streets accompanied by musicians. Other members of the groups, representing particular lineages, wear cow-masks; usually the relatives of the dead wear white scarves around their necks. After the procession, the masks are taken off and hung up at



the main temple of each locality. "It is commonly said that the Malla period officials standing at the palace — which the procession must pass on the festival route — could, by counting the figures, tell how many men, women, boys and girls had died in Bhaktapur during the previous year."

The procession moves inside the town around the main festival road. To participate in this festival is considered a necessary part of the long sequence of rituals done after the death of any person. The festival's carnival-like aspects include farmers who dress up as women and dance: such dances with their explicit sexual references are sometimes obscene. Often dancers are dressed as *sādhus* or mimic different deities, most frequently the couple Śiva-Parvati, or Rāma and Sītā. Today the festival is a time when opinions can be expressed freely and political criticism voiced. One can make fun of priests or other figures of authority. "Some people carry placards decrying social ills — real, exaggerated or entirely imaginary. Local newspapers participate in the satire with stories announcing a great increase in salary for the superfluous masses of government workers. . . . On this day, supposedly, citizens are free to express themselves without fear of reprisal."

The Buddhists do not observe this festival for their dead. In the town of Pātan they hold a festival called 'Festival of lights' (*Mataya*) which is celebrated in the month of August. The procession of the Buddhists in the town consists of a visit to all the *caitya* or *stūpa*: this can take as long as fifteen hours, it is a local pilgrimage. The most essential offering is the offering of light in the dead person's name. "Traditionally the Mataya festival celebrated the Buddha's defeat of the Maras and attainment of Enlightenment. As part of the

Fig. 28: The festival of *Gai Jātrā* at Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).



procession, groups of young men dress up outlandishly, put on face masks and behave, by local standards, in ways which break the rules of decorum. They are said to represent the Maras (destroyers, i.e., demon tempters). A farmer also goes along, every year, dressed as Mahādeva, and he is supposed to be rendering homage to Lord Buddha." In Kāthmāṇḍu, on the evening of the fourth day of the *Indra Jātrā* the Buddhists participate with Hindus in the circumambulations of the town. First they go around the city boundaries offering lights and secondly they follow a farmer with a white mask dressed as Dāgī or Dākinī.

After a death, if the funerary rituals have been accomplished, the deceased will find his place among the ancestors. Nevertheless, simultaneously, he must reincarnate, according to his merits, among living beings. Hindu notions of the body and of the person differ from European notions in the sense that the former think that the self (*ātman*) is immortal and is reincarnated. "The person is never entirely new when born, never entirely gone when dead. Both his body and soul extend into past and future persons, and to a significant degree his biological substance is shared in the present with kin who have the same body particles." The Europeans do not share this widespread belief in reincarnation.

### References

1. Ch. Malamoud, p. 449.
2. Ch. Malamoud, p. 447. See also J. Parry, 1994, p. 211. "Almost standardised links in a chain of descent, an ancestor's social existence is rather short lived. No shrine, monument or other material object preserves his memory. During the rituals he is, of course, naturally embodied in the *pindas*."

3. D. Gellner, 1992, p. 210.
4. Ch. Malamoud, 1980, p. 99.
5. J. Parry, 1994, p. 200: "The Vaitarni river is described as flowing with pus and blood, has banks of unscalable bone, mud of flesh and gore and exhaust congested by hair. One of the heifers given at Vrishotsarg helps the soul across, and their scene is acted out in the course in the ritual. A trench has been dug to represent Vaitarni which flows south making this river of pollution an inversion of the paradigmatically pure Ganges which in Banaras flows south." *See also* R. B. Pandey, 1949, p. 411.
6. G.S. Nepali, 1966, pp. 353-55. *See also* R. Levy, 1990, pp. 442-44.
7. G.G. Filippi, 1996, p. 160: "Originally this ritual was probably a bull sacrifice, to provide the *preta* with the necessary nourishment for reaching the *pitrloka*." *See also* J. Parry, 1994, p. 223.
8. R. Levy, 1990, p. 444.
9. M. Anderson, 1971, p. 108.
10. D. Gellner, 1992, pp. 88 and 97.
11. J. Parry, 1994, p. 172.

**Fig. 29:** The dancer representing the demon Savo Bhaku at Kathmandu during the festival of *Indra jātrā* (photo: Suzanne Held). →



## Masks Worn during Ritual Dances

MASKS which are worn by men during rituals or festivals are part of their costumes. The Newari word *pyakha*, which is usually translated as 'dance', means literally, 'seeing a dress-up or a costume disguise'. These masks which as we have said one can call ritual masks are made of perishable materials such as papier maché, wood plastered with clay and linen, and are painted in lively colours as indeed all statues used to be. It is difficult to know how old these ritual dances (*pyakha*) are: they are also called 'dances of gods'. The word *dyah*, which means god, is applied to images as well as to forces distinct from images but which nevertheless can be brought to reside in them. A mask is only part of an ensemble: the dancers must wear the appropriate clothes and before starting to dance they have to have a dark mark put in the middle of their forehead which is the symbol of Nasadyah, the Newar epithet for Šiva, god of dance and music. It is Šiva who confers exceptional powers on the dancers who will be inhabited by the gods or goddesses throughout the time their dances last.

It seems that dances as festivals were patronized by the Malla kings of the Kāthmāṇḍu Valley during the late medieval period. According to oral tradition and chronicles, in Bhaktapur it was the king Ananda Malla (1147-66), the founder

of the town, “who was instructed by the Nava Durga to set their images in proper places so as to ensure the security and protection of the town both internally and externally.” Later the king Suvarna Malla, king of Bhaktapur, in order to maintain the ritual dance performance reorganised it in 1445. He then inaugurated such a series of performances in such a manner that the dances take place consecutively in all 24 quarters of the town of Bhaktapur and then in the surrounding localities of the kingdom. According to written texts, ritual dances which were performed at Harasiddhi (or Jala) were introduced by king Varadeva, son of king Narendra Deva (seventh century AD). He decided that the dances should be performed in front of Red Avalokiteśvara as part of the worship of that deity. The king Gunakamadeva, the founder of the town of Kāthmāṇdu, “... likewise established within and without the city the images of Nava Durga and in the south direction out of the town was placed Pachali Bhairava.”

One striking feature emerges when one compares the oral and written accounts of such ritual dances: it is that they have always been under royal control. In Nepal only the king could decide to introduce a new dance-drama or a new festival. On the other hand, the group of Nava-Durgā is part of the Newar pantheon. The Nava-Durgā dances begin at the time of the festival of *Dasain* or *Dussehra* in all the three former capitals of the Valley. The processions on the occasion of the major festivals are important parts of the proceedings. “Dances and cortéses of masks usually complete the procession; the baroque and rather frightening fancy of the disguises reminds one of the devilish dances of Shamanism and Lamaist Buddhism. Actors wearing heads of tigers, bears, lions with thick manes, stamp, jump

**Fig. 30: Mask of Śiva in gilt copper. Sixteenth century.**  
We can suppose that this was attached to a chariot  
(photo: A. Vergati). →





Fig. 31: The chariot (*ratha*) of Nava-Durgā dancers in Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).

and shout. Permanent platforms, built in masonry and bricks on the great squares, serve as stages for these performances.”

On the tenth day, *Vijaya Daśamī*, strange processions are held in different quarters of the old town of Kāthmāṇḍu. These processions are known as ‘Sword processions’, the sword in question being the symbol of the Goddess Durgā. In the group of the

dancers at Kāthmāṇḍu, the goddess Bhadrakālī, who in Bhaktapur is called Vaiṣṇavī, has a special role: she ‘exchanges’ a sword with the king who on his side has the sword of the previous Malla dynasty (1200-1768). There is not an exchange in the real sense of the word: each party retains his own sword. However the result of this encounter with the goddess Bhadrakālī is to provide the king with divine ‘power’. The fact that the goddess Bhadrakālī is also called Vaiṣṇavī at Bhaktapur shows her direct links with royalty. “As a major event the exchange of swords is recorded in books on culture, tourist guides (although it is nowadays very hard to approach the scene), newspaper articles, and more recently Television broadcasts.” Buddhist priests, dressed up to represent Bhairava, Kumārī, the goddess Ajimā, Ganeśa (called in Newari Kisi) and other deities, move through excited crowds of spectators, carrying



Figs. 32 & 33: *Lakhe* mask worn by a man, while dancing in the streets of Kathmandu representing a demon, during the festival of *Indra Jātrā* (photo: Thomas Ozoux).

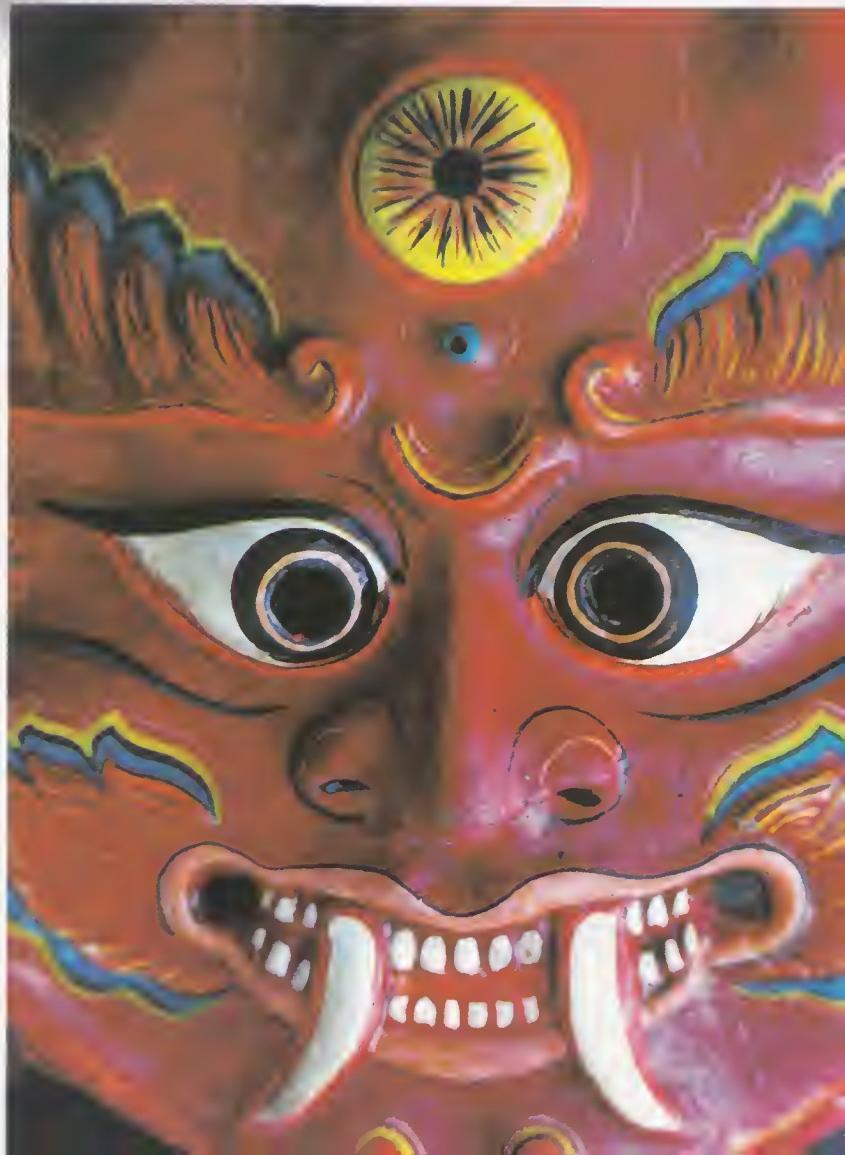




Fig. 34: Another dancer representing Bhaku (or Savo Bhaku), a demon, who dances in the streets of Kathmandu during the festival of *Indra Jātrā* (photo: Suzanne Held).

through excited crowds of spectators, carrying sheathed swords, each dancer being accompanied by a musical fanfare. In single file they go around Buddhist temples and *stūpas*. Some of them are possessed and, being inhabited by the gods and goddesses, they shake and tremble.

During the festival of *Indra Jātrā* the elephant is worshiped by the farmers of Kāthmāṇdu, the Jyapu of Kilagul, in the central part of the town. "According to local traditions the present site of Kilagul was covered once with a dense forest, abounding in elephants. The tradition is preserved by worshiping a wooden elephant as a family deity as well as Kisi Gane, the elephant Ganesha." The dance of the elephant during *Indra Jātrā* is performed by two members of the farmers' caste. Among the Newars it is well-known that the elephant is the vehicle of the god Indra.

S. Lévi at the end of the nineteenth century drew attention to the fact that the *yātrā* (processions) prefigure dramatic performances and the art of drama. "The *yātrā* (processions) contains in germ the notion of the art of drama, to which Tantric beliefs gave new life. Inspired by them, the *yātrā* provoked a renewal of Indian theatre in Bengal. In Nepal too, they seem to have been transformed, early on, into 'living pictures'."



Fig. 35: Two dancers representing two demons, *lakhe*, performing in the street during the festival of *Indra Jātrā* at Kathmandu. These dances are a popular event during the festival and they are followed by an enthusiastic crowd of onlookers. (photo: Suzanne Held).



The *lakhe* dances are today a part of the *Indra Jātrā* festival in Kāthmāndu. The word *lakhe* means 'demon', and the masks worn by the dancers are unusual. They are sometimes in wood with a tail of hair and painted with violent colours. The dancers always perform in a group and are accompanied by a band of musicians. These dances are a popular event; the participants fight with swords in the streets of the town. "It is in the masks of the *lakhe* dances that an Indian artistic influence can be seen, for the faces portrayed in these masks bear a striking resemblance to the faces of demons found in Mughal and Rajasthani miniature paintings. The most typical of the *lakhe* masks exhibit the same double-fanged grin, crossed-eyes and bulbous faces found in Indian miniatures from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."

The dances of the *lakhe* demons take place during the day time; they always dance in pairs. The crowd will treat them with respect and generally people are afraid that the *lakhe* will become angry and lash out at them. I quote here a short description of a *lakhe* dance which took place recently at Pyangaon village during the festival of *Indra Jātrā*. "On the second day of the festival occurs a dance of *lakhe*, a demon who, as always, is played by a man. The dancer wears a red mask surmounted by a great mane composed of yak hair. He wears only a waistcoat over his bare chest and a green skirt (*jama*) held, at the waist, by a belt and a chain of bells. When he dances he waves little scarves, white in colour and attached to his wrists and arms. The *lakhe* dancer is accompanied by a troop of four or five musicians who clash their



↑ Fig. 37: A dancer of the group of Nine Durgā with a mask representing the goddess Indrāyanī, Kathmandu (photo: Suzanne Held).



Fig. 36: Another dancer representing a demon with a sword dancing in the streets of Kathmandu during the festival of *Indra Jātrā* (photo: Suzanne Held).



cymbals and beat their drums. Another personage called *tini pakucca* dances with him: he is a youth of 16 or 17 wearing a gold-coloured mask and a black skirt with a red border. He holds in his hand a stick which he brandishes while dancing. Some people say that *tini pakucca* is the *lakhe*'s friend, others say that he is his wife."

"Almost certainly the ritual dances are older than the surviving examples of the masks worn. The masks worn in former days could not last for long in a monsoon climate as they were made of papier maché or wood, and they were often destroyed after the annual ceremonies in which they were worn. Newar dance-masks in wood are rare; today only the *lakhe* demons use them. "Among the oldest Newar masks known is a highly patinated example in wood which may be from the seventeenth century."

The ritual dances of the Nava-Durgā are performed in the main localities of the Valley: Kāthmāndu, Kirtipur, Pātan, Theco, Bhaktapur, Panauti. They dance during eight months and a half. The dancers are always men from the caste of gardeners (*Gāthā* or *Māli*), their traditional profession being to make and sell garlands of flowers for worship of the gods. The dancers are selected every year, and they constitute a group (*gāna*): for eight months they live together; their residence is the temple of Nava-Durgā where the masks are usually kept. All the dancers are men but the priest of the Nava-Durgā temple at Bhaktapur is a woman from the same caste, *gatha*. She has to perform the daily cult, *nitya pūjā* inside the temple and she has to look after the troupe of dancers when they live inside the temple. The dances normally start on the last day of Dasaim or *Dussehra*, the great autumn festival at the end of September/October and they end in the month of June, just before the rainy season starts. The



description of the Nava-Durgā masks is emphasized here for the masked dances are very popular, and are performed in a similar manner in each locality. There are good descriptions of these dances and we can try to understand their meaning and significance. The masked dances take place only in the streets and public places unlike the Buddhist dances which are performed inside the Tantric sanctuaries of the monasteries.

In other parts of the Valley, at Harasiddhi (or Jala), a small town famous for the ritual dances performed there in the month of March, the dancers belong to the caste of farmers but they are also the priests of Jaladyah temple. "Their positions are inherited for life. The eldest son of a priest inherits the role of his father. He becomes a priest, and plays the role of one of the characters or gods in the drama. Thus, in becoming a priest of Jaladyah, one becomes one of the Jaladyah (lit. 'god of Jala'). These men are neither simply priests of the gods nor are they actors portraying the gods; but rather, in assuming their roles, they have become the Jaladyah gods and are recognised and treated as such by the entire community for the rest of their life."

The group of masks from Harasiddhi includes gods and goddesses of the Buddhist as well as of the Hindu pantheon: Bali rājā, Ganeśa, Mahādeva, Pārvatī, Agni, the demon *lakhe*, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sugrīva, Mañjuśrī, the creator of the Valley for the Buddhists, with his two wives. The largest mask is the mask representing Ganeśa: two men dance inside it while one man guides them from the outside. Each dancer performs alone and he sings his or her own song in the 'language of the gods'. In fact the words of this song are a kind of *mantra* which is played on two copper trumpets, called in Newari *pvaga*. It needs to be



Fig. 38: Nava-Durgā dancers at Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).



Fig. 39: Nava-Durgā dancers at Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).

stressed that the masks worn at the Harasiddhi dances are not destroyed after use but are conserved and reconsecrated year after year.

At the heart of the performances are dances: without the performance of the dances there is no festival. The inhabitants of each locality appreciate the quality of the dancers and of the musicians who play also an important role. There is no procession, no ritual dance, without music. The musicians are part of the group of dancers. The dance is associated with drama, with music, with the decoration of the body and possession by the gods. I quote here what a specialist of Newar music has written recently about Bhaktapur:

Newar music combines artistic achievements with a definite social and ritual function, establishing and reinforcing a basic harmony in the town as



**Fig. 40: Drum of Nava-Durgā  
dancers at Bhaktapur**  
(photo: A. Vergati).

well as between the two overlapping worlds, the world of men and the realm of the gods. There is art music, as such, which is meant to be performed on a stage for playing to an audience of connoisseurs. In fact, the whole town serves as a stage, and — with the strict exception of the womenfolk — almost everybody seems to be a musician or a dancer.

In the study concerning the ritual masked dances in Jala the role of the music is stressed; the ritual drama starts with the worshiping of Nasa dyo, epithet of Śiva, who is the Newari god of music.

There are a number of legends about the origin of the cult and the dances of the Nava-Durgā. One of the legends popular in Bhaktapur gives the following account. The Nine Goddesses used to live out of the town in the forest and were

harassing and killing people who were on their way between Bhaktapur and Nala, a small town in the former kingdom of Bhaktapur. Once upon a time an Acaju, a priest with Tantric abilities, was caught by them. The nine Durgā got ready to kill him but before this happened he managed to ask for a favour : that he be allowed to worship them. Utilizing the full force of his *mantra*, he succeeded in bringing the goddesses under his control. With the power of these *mantra* he made them very small in size and put them in a basket. He carried this basket to his home and put it in a secret room in his house in Nala, so as to hide the Nine Goddesses from the eyes of the non-initiated. When this Tantric priest eventually died, the goddesses were left unattended and caused other members of the family to die. Later a brāhmaṇa, with deep Tantric knowledge, came from Bhaktapur to Nala. When trying to help the family he inquired about the habits of the deceased Acaju. After having been told that the latter used to disappear into a secret room, the brāhmaṇa, in turn, found the goddesses. He took them to his home in Bhaktapur and there he continued to worship them faithfully. One of his wives, however, was curious enough to enter the secret room. As a result of this disturbance, the initial agreement between the Tantric priest and the goddesses was violated. The goddesses therefore left the house, assumed their original form, and killed the first pig they came across while roaming through the streets. The brāhmaṇa was not powerful enough to force the goddesses — now polluted by the blood of a pig — to return back into the secret room of the house. A new agreement, however, was then reached : the goddesses were installed in a temple as the Nava-Durgā and members of the *Gāthā* caste, landless gardeners and day-labourers, were compelled to take care of



**Fig. 41: Dancer representing the goddess Brahmāyaṇi at Kathmandu during the festival of Dasai (or Dashara), 1993 (photo:G. Krauskopff).**

them. The stories about the origin of the Nava-Durgā dances and the stories related to the different sequences in the dances are forms of local knowledge but most people do not know the details or the meaning. Most of the inhabitants of the town relate the events portrayed in the legend.

In another version of the legend of Nava-Durgā the Tantric priest by worshiping the Nava-Durgā hypnotised them by his Tantric force and knowledge. After his prayers and chanting of hymns, the Nava-Durgā couldn't move and they surrendered to the priest. The priest through a secret *mantra* and his Tantric 'power' transferred their 'lives' into masks which used to be kept secretly in his house. He used to worship the Nava-Durgā by dancing in front of them. After one year, while the priest was worshiping in a secret room, the wife of the priest looked through the door hole into the secret room. The Nava-Durgā became angry and furiously came out by smashing the door. On their way out they met a pig and killed it with their long nails. The priest tried to call them

back by chanting and playing music on a small drum (*damarū*). They refused to come back and asked the priest to make replicas of the masks kept in the secret room and organise a public performance of the dance. The priest agreed and taught the dance to the members of the caste of gardeners. What is particularly interesting in the version of the legend is the transfer of the 'lives' by a *mantra* of the Nava-Durgā into the masks by the priest: the ritual being similar to that performed by Buddhist priests for the royal deity Red Avalokiteśvara in Pāṭan.

In all the versions of this legend there are a number of similarities. For example, the Nine Goddesses at the start usually dwell outside the town and it is only a Tantric priest (or a brāhmaṇa), or a person with 'power', who knows the *mantra*, who can worship them. By performing the ritual daily he has the power to control them. The legends stress also the importance of initiation in Tantric practices and, in this case, in worship of the Nava-

Fig. 42: Nava-Durgā dancer in the streets of Bhaktapur (photo: Xintian Postel).



Durgā. Only a person who has received the initiation (*dekhā* or *dīkṣā*) will be able to worship the goddesses daily. They are dangerous in the sense that they can kill people. A pig is sacrificed in order to appease and feed the goddesses. Among Newars, the pig is considered an impure animal which is eaten only by low castes; the higher castes not being allowed to touch a pig.<sup>16</sup> The goddesses who can eat pig are polluted so it is emphasized in different versions of the legend that they cannot go back to the house of the Tantric priest.

A number of deities accept animal sacrifices, for instance, various Hindu goddesses, Kālī, Bhagavatī, and Gods such as Bhairava, Ganeśa, Bhimsen. To offer an animal sacrifice to pure deities such as Viṣṇu, or to a *bodhisattva*, would be a sin. The Nava-Durgā are the only goddesses for whom an impure animal is sacrificed: so they are considered to be more in the category of demons than of goddesses. The animals usually offered to others goddesses are goats, chicken, and ducks; the goddess is supposed to drink the blood of the sacrificed animals and usually the head of the animal sacrificed is put close to the image of the goddess. "The Nine Durgā, like all dangerous deities, are brought under control not through ordinary moral action nor the kind of devotion that influences ordinary deities but by an act of power, the Tantric *mantra* of a particularly skillful practitioner. Ordinary people, as we will see, can control them only through blood sacrifice."<sup>17</sup> There is another version of the legend known by Tantric brāhmaṇas which explains why the Nine Durgā should receive the sacrifice of an animal considered impure, such as the pig. In Tantrism, power often has its source in impurity: Sanderson has drawn attention to:

"a fundamental structure of values which,

arguably, underlies a far wider range of cultural forms in the kingdoms of medieval India. Its terms are purity and power. At one extreme are those who seek omnipotence and at the other those who seek depersonalized purity. The former are impure in the eyes of the latter and the latter impotent in the eyes of the former. The former seek unlimited power through a visionary act of impurity while the latter seek to realize through the path of purity an essential unmotivatedness which culminates, in the most uncompromising form of their doctrine, in the liberating realization that they have done and will do nothing, that the power of action is an illusion. The absolute of the impure is absolute Power; that of the pure is inert Being".

This power, acquired through impurity, helps the goddesses to restore the social order. "The story goes that in the past age the people of the earth had been polluting the earth with urination and defecations. Everywhere the world was dirty and everywhere there were bad smells. The gods consulted with Vishnu and asked him, as he had so often done, to come to the help of the world. The gods did not want to do anything to get rid of the feces themselves for fear of contaminating themselves. Finally Vishnu agreed to incarnate himself as a pig and to eat the feces. 'But', he said to the gods, 'if I do this I will become polluted and it will be difficult for me to again escape from the world'. The Nine Durgās said to him that they would agree to take and eat the pig as a sacrifice, and thus through the sacrifice of that pig make it possible for it (and the incarnate Vishnu) to gain salvation."



The goddesses represented by masks in the Nava-Durgā are Mahākālī, Vaiṣṇavi, Brahmāṇī, Indrāṇī, Māheśvarī, Kumārī, and Vārāhī. There are different lists of names of Nava-Durgā in different Indian texts. The names of the group of goddesses are identical for the three towns of the Valley.<sup>20</sup> The group of the dancers also include five other masks, those of Bhairava, Gaṇeśa, Seto Bhairava (white Bhairava), Sima and Duma, these last two are said to be popular names for lion (*simha*) and tiger (*vyāghrinī*). Some people explain that these two masks are a couple, the white-faced Sima being the male; and others are of the opinion that they are two goddesses. On the staircase of the temple called Nyatapola at Bhaktapur there are two ranks of huge guardians: "at the bottom are giants Jaya Malla and Phatta, athletes in the king's service and reputed to have the strength of ten men; above them are two elephants, ten times stronger yet; then continuing with two lions, two tigers and the goddesses Simghinī and Vyāgrinī. They are found at the entrance of other Śaivaite temples in Kāthmāṇḍu Valley. Mahālakṣmī, the goddess linked with kingship, is represented by a small mask in silver repoussé, which is hung on a chariot carried by the dancers during their performance. Mahālakṣmī is an external form of the tutelary goddess of the royal dynasty, Taleju. She is also known as the 'oleander deity' (*Siphadya* in Newari): she is understood to be the eighth goddess of the group.

It seems that the ninth goddess is Tripurasundarī who is at the centre of the *maṇḍala* of the eight goddesses protecting the town. Some dancers explained that in the group of Nava Durgā she is represented by a small image which is never taken out of the temple. The temple of the goddess Tripurasundarī, located close to the Royal Palace, is considered the



Fig. 43: A dancer representing Gaṇeśa in the streets of Kathmandu during the festival of Dasai (or Dashara), 1993 (photo: G. Krauskopff).



Fig. 44: Nava Durga dancer in the streets of Bhaktapur, February 1995, (photo: Xintian Postel).

religious centre of Bhaktapur.<sup>24</sup> Śiva is also represented by a small mask which is not worn and has no eyeholes: it is attached to the costume of the dancer who incarnates Gaṇeśa and, during the performances, is hung on the chariot carried by the dancers alongside the Mahālakṣmī mask. In Bhaktapur, Seto Bhairava, as a representation of the young Śiva, is one of the main characters in the masked dances. He is a comic figure: his behaviour is non-conformist, sometimes obscene, throughout the dances. Let me now give a description of the dance of Mahākālī and Seto Bhairava at Bhaktapur:

While Mahākālī is dancing, Seto Bhairava smears himself with a white pigment (a mixture of oil and white powder that is used otherwise in marriage ceremonies as a cosmetic for the bride). He has been given this as well as *ghee*, brown sugar, and a

white shawl by one of the members of the local area, who is responsible for local supplies and arrangements. Seto Bhairava puts the white pigment on his face and hands and puts on his mask. He then puts the shawl over his head, approaches the place where Mahākālī is dancing and, seating himself with head still covered, slowly moves his head about in a fashion that is interpreted as a kind of mockery or making fun of the dancing Mahākālī. Keeping one's head covered in this fashion in front of a deity (in this case a superior deity) is to show disrespect. Mahākālī becomes enraged and shakes her head in a quivering motion indicating her great anger. She suddenly seizes the shawl from Seto Bhairava's head and holds it in her hand. Seto Bhairava wants to get his shawl back from her and the next part of the sequence has to do with his attempt to recover it. First he makes a gesture of respect to Mahākālī, but she ignores it and turns her head away. This attempt having failed, Seto Bhairava turns to the onlookers and begs for small coins. Some people in the crowd give coins to him. Seto Bhairava now offers the money to Mahākālī, asking her to take the coins as an offering. Mahākālī takes the money from him but does not return the shawl. All this ineffectiveness is amusing to the spectators. Now this part of the drama comes to a climax. Seto Bhairava takes a cock, which one of the onlookers hands to him, and offers it to Mahākālī. At first she is angry; she keeps her head turned away and will not take it. Then suddenly she grabs the cock, and, with an angry gesture, throws the shawl back into Seto Bhairava's face. Now Mahākālī bites



**Fig. 45: A dancer in Kathmandu during the festival of Dasai (Dashara) 1993 (photo: G. Krauskopff).**

the head of the living cock  
and <sup>25</sup>drinks its gushing  
blood.

That is the most spectacular dance sequence. In another sequence Seto Bhairava 'goes fishing'. He tries to catch a young boy from the audience who will be the 'fish'. The audience shout and tease Seto Bhairava while he is chasing them around the area. The young people try to persuade the dancer to do more than three rounds. Every dancer is supposed to go around the square three times. The person who is caught has to be dragged back onto the stage and has to pay for an offering to the image of Mahālakṣmī. It is considered inauspicious for a young person to be caught. During this sequence Seto Bhairava shows disrespect to the powerful goddess Mahākālī.

In all performances, Bhairava heads the troupe of Nava Durgā. In Bhaktapur, in the group of dancers, two masks dominate by their size and their dark colours:

One of these is the dark Bhairava, the main actor in the ceremonies that are the immediate context of the dance-drama, and the other is the dark clotted-blood-red Mahākālī, who is represented with emaciated flesh, deep-set eyes, and facial bones protruding in a cadaverous way through her skin. Mahākālī is the main

antagonistic figure of the dance-drama itself.<sup>26</sup>

Bhairava has a major role in most performances and it is he who has to kill the pig which is sacrificed for the goddesses. He is the only one among the dancers (except Mahākālī) who kills an animal. He does this by splitting the skin of the pig's foreleg with his fingernail and separating the skin until he reaches the thoracic cage. Then he pulls out the heart and offers it to the goddess Mahālakṣmī. All the dancers will drink the blood from the pig's chest. The dancer representing Mahākālī will kill a cock (which is not considered an impure animal) during her performance. After drinking the blood of the sacrificed pig, the dancers will start to tremble. This is the sign that the dancers are possessed by the goddesses.

These dances which take place on public squares and on the streets thread their way through large crowds of men and women. The latter are not just spectators: sometimes they throw things to the dancers, teasing them as well as watching them. At Harasiddhi, where the dancers are considered living gods for they have been selected for life, their role is not limited to their presence in the performance. Spectators treat the dancer-priests with great respect and worship them. The vision of the gods at this time is perhaps more important to them than the quality of the performance. As each dance ends the spectators offer clothes and flowers to the <sup>27</sup> dancers as if they were making offerings to gods.

All the groups of dancers all over the Valley include forms of the goddess Kālī and her male counterpart Bhairava as well as the indispensable god Ganeśa as the main deities. I quote comments made on the cult of Bhairava and Kālī in Tantric texts:

Here at the ground-level of the cults of Bhairava and Kali the Tantric deities reveal to us another aspect. They are not projections of the inner power structure of autonomous consciousness but rather regents of hordes of dangerous and predominantly female forces which populated the domain of excluded possibilities that hemmed about the path of purity, clamouring to break through the barrier protecting its social and metaphysical self. Externally, this barrier was the line between pure and impure space, on the largest scale that which separated the caste-ordered community from the pollutant cremation grounds at its edge. Internally it was maintained by conformity to his dharma.

Another aspect of the different versions of the legend of the origin of masked dances of Nava-Durgā is that in legends of the Nava Durgā goddesses kill people and a human sacrifice is necessary in order to appease them. Hamilton, an English writer at the beginning of the nineteenth century, reported information about the Nava-Durgā dancers in the Valley:

From those who come to worship at the temple, the Gatha that represent these deities (the Nava Durgā) accept the spirituous liquors, which they drink out of the human skulls until they become elevated and dance in a furious manner, and they drink the blood of animals which are offered as sacrifices. In these temples the priests are Achars, who at the sacrifices read the forms of prayer proper for the occasion but retire when the animal is about to be killed by the Gatha who represents Bhairavi. The shrine, in which

the images of the gods are kept, is always shut; and no persons allowed to enter but the priest (*pujari*) and the Gatha who personate in masks these deities. Once in twelve years the Raja offers a solemn sacrifice. It consists of two men, of such a rank they wear a thread; of two buffaloes, two goats, two rams, two cocks, two ducks and two fishes. The lower animals are first sacrificed in the outer part of the temple, and in presence of the multitude their blood is drunk by the masked Gatha. . . . After this, the human victims are intoxicated, and carried into the shrine, where the mask representing Bhairavi cuts their throats, and sprinkles their blood on the idols. Their skulls are then formed into cups which serve the masks for drinking in their horrid rites.

Today belief in human sacrifice is more common than its reality not only among the Newars but also in India. The period of twelve years is important for all main festivals, whether Buddhist or Hindu.

Fig. 46: Dancers in the main courtyard of the Royal Palace in Patan during the festival of Dashara. 1993. Photo (photo: G. Krauskopff).





Fig. 47: Torana representing Akāśa Bhairava on the main entrance of Bhairava temple in Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).

It is said that every twelve years a human sacrifice should be offered to the Nava-Durgā of Theco, a locality close to Pātan,<sup>30</sup> or at Harasiddhi (or Jala). The following describes the oral tradition about the origin of the great temple of Paraśurāma at Nirmand situated in Nurpur Valley on the river Sutlej (Himachal Pradesh):

The brahmins also agreed amongst themselves to remember Parasurama-by celebrating a fair called Bhunda (a form of human sacrifice) every twelve years, coinciding with the Kumbha festival on the Ganges at Hardwar, or Prayag (Allahabad). The rite of Bhunda later came to be connected with nearly each and every god in the Simla hills including outer parts of

Kullu and amongst the several centres where Bhunda was practised may be Nithar, Shamsher, Behena and Gorah (Rampur).

In Indian mythology, from the Veda down, this power principle is constantly reiterated: whenever a demon, by command of a god, is forced, for one reason or another, to release its legitimate prey, some substitute must be provided. Some new victim has to be offered to assuage and stay the voraciousness of this new power body at large in the reaches of the world.

What is particular to the town of Pātan is that, during the festival of Dasaim, it is not only the Nava-Durgā dance group which performs. Another group of dancers who belong to the high caste of Buddhist priests (*vajrācārya*) and former monks, śākyas, wearing masks of the eight goddesses *aṣṭa māṭrakā* who protect the limits of the town, also dance throughout nine days in different parts of the town of Pātan.<sup>33</sup> Their dances end on the last day of the festival of Dasaim. This shows clearly that there are two distinct groups of goddesses. It seems that there is another dance-drama held every year in the month of October or November (*Kārttika*): it is a dramatic presentation of legends centered around Viṣṇu.<sup>34</sup> During this month numerous ceremonies are held throughout the Valley in honour of Viṣṇu.

In the Introduction, it was mentioned that Buddhist priests perform dances for esoteric deities such as Cakrasaṁvara. I give here a

Fig. 48: Ākāśa Bhairava in gilt copper at Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).





Fig. 49: A dancer of the group of Nine Durga (Nava Durga) with a mask representing the goddess Cāmuṇḍā (or Mahākālī), Kathmandu (photo: Suzanne Held).



Fig. 50: A dancer of the group of Nine Durga (Nava Durga) with a mask representing the goddess Brahmayāṇi, Kathmandu (photo: Suzanne Held).

**Fig. 51: Three dancers with masks representing the goddesses Brahmāyanī, Cāmuṇḍā and Indrāyaṇī of the group of Nine Durga at Kathmandu (photo: Suzanne Held). →**

very short description of these dances which I have never seen personally. “The central deity Cakrasaṁvara is shown with four heads created by using two masks (one with three heads and the fourth, smaller head, attached to the back of the dancer’s head). He is joined in the centre of the *maṇḍala* by his consort Vajravārāhī and the pair are surrounded by various attendant *dakas* and *dakinis* (esoteric Buddhist deities) including two birds and two animal-headed *dakinis* and the *dakinis* of the eight directions.”<sup>35</sup> As in the case of all esoteric deities in Nepal, the cult and the image of Cakrasaṁvara are secret: only the initiated Buddhist can participate in his worship. It is obvious that this group of masked dancers form a *maṇḍala* which can be compared with those in Newar paintings. In order to understand the iconographical details, one can moreover refer to the textual description of the *maṇḍala* of Cakrasaṁvara.<sup>36</sup> “Within the divine abode (the *maṇḍala*), in the center of the circle on a solar disk resting on an eight petalled lotus, is Cakrasaṁvara himself. He has four faces, the front one dark blue, the left one green, the back one red and the right one yellow. These symbolize the four material elements (earth, water, fire and air), the four infinitudes (= pure abodes *brahma-vihara*), the four releases and the four ritual acts. His body is blue, indicating that he does not diverge from the celestial Dharma sphere. Each face has three eyes, indicating that he sees the (whole) three-fold world and that he knows the substance of the three times (past, present and future). He has twelve arms, indicating that he comprehends the evolution and reversal of the twelvefold causal nexus and eliminates these twelve stages of transmigration. With his first pair of hands, which hold a vajra and bell, he embraces his spouse, symbolizing the union of Wisdom and Means. With his next pair of hands (he holds aloft)



a raw elephant hide made into a garment, thus ridding the elephant of illusion. . . . Since he (Cakrasamvara) is replete with accumulations (of merits and knowledge), the tip of his matted hair, which is bound up on the top of his head, is adorned with a precious wish-granting gem, for he bestows all desirable things in accordance with one's wishes. Since the Thought of Enlightenment is ever on the increase, there is a lunar crescent on the left side, while on the top of his massed hair there is a crossed double *vajra* (*vishvavajra*) indicating that he operates through different kinds of action for the good of living beings. There is a crown made of five dessicated human heads surmounting each of his four faces, indicating the fully developed quality of the five Wisdoms.”

All the dancers who wear masks are men. At the same time one sees that the hierarchy of the gods is linked to the human hierarchy in this world. The masks of the *aṣṭa mātrikā*, the eight goddesses linked to cardinal points, are worn by Buddhist priests (*vajrācārya*) in the town of Patan. All over the Valley those of the demoniacal forms of the Nava-Durgā goddesses are worn only by low-caste gardeners (*gāthā*).

The above account of the masked dances shows that the Nava-Durgā dances are the only ones which last throughout a period of several months and that they are closely connected with kingship, having thus a political aspect. The other masked dances, which last only the time of a festival, figure in processions and great festivals. In such dances the masks of the dancers, even when they portray gods and goddesses, have a demoniacal aspect. Also these dances take place within the boundaries of a locality where the festival of which they are a part occurs.

Lastly the masked dances at Harasiddhi illustrate a complex pantheon of both Hindu and Buddhist gods. They are theatrical performances rather than ritual masked dances. The dances are performed behind a curtain which is held between the dancer and the audience. "The curtain is painted with images of three deities, the central main deity is blue and three eyed, holding a skull cup in one hand and making the gesture of offering with the other hand, which also holds a sword. The deity to the left is yellow and the deity to the right is red." It seems that the deities painted represent the Trisakti. The curtain is used for entrances and exits of all characters, and it marks the beginning and the end of each main scene. It is obvious that most people, regardless of their position in society, relate easily to the events and the gods portrayed during the performances.

## References

1. L. Iltis, 1987, p. 208.
2. B.J. Hasrat, 1970, p. 49.
3. D. Wright, 1877, p. 152.
4. J.P. Hasrat, 1970, p. 46 and S. Lévi, 1905, vol. I, pp. 52-53.
5. S. Lévi, 1905, vol. II, p. 42.
6. B. van den Hoek, 1992, p. 388.
7. G. Singh Nepali, 1966, p. 329 and B. Van den Hoek, 1992, p. 388.
8. S. Lévi, 1905, vol. II, p. 46.
9. I. Alsop, 1993, p. 53. *See also* M. Postel, 1985, p. 57, ill. 72. Demon masks of wood are found in Himachal Pradesh. They are worn by villagers who enact an annual ritual battle between Śaktidevī and the autochthonous evil spirits.
10. G. Toffin, 1982, p. 93.
11. I. Alsop, 1993, p. 56.
12. L. Iltis, 1987, p. 205.
13. G.M. Wegner, 1987, p. 71.
14. This version of the legend was published by N. Gutschow, 1987, pp. 137-38. *See also* R. Levy, 1990, pp. 503-4. G. Toffin, 1984, gives another legend for Theco, a locality in the former kingdom of Pātan pp. 468-69.
15. G. Singh Nepali, 1965, p. 330: "The pig is much more importantly worshiped in Bhaktapur in the east, where it receives the name of Bhukha deya, god of earthquakes. It is believed by the local inhabitants that, if this god shakes itself, it is an indication of an earthquake."
16. R. Levy, 1992, p. 506.
17. A. Sanderson, 1985, p. 192.

18. R. Levy, 1992, p. 507.
19. J.N. Banerjee, 1956, p. 500 : "there are different lists of the names of Nava Durgā. Monier-Williams mentions Kumarika, Trimurti, Kalyani, Rohini, Kali, Candika, Sambhavi, Durga and Bhadra on the authority of some unnamed lexicon. . . . A list of Devikavaca of the *Devimahatmya* reads Sailaputri, Brahma-carini, Changradhanta, Kusmanda, Skandamala, Kathayani, Kalaratri, Mahagauri, and Siddhidatri. . . . Some other Purāṇas give the names thus: Ugracanda, Pracanda, Candogra, Candanayika, Canda, Candavati, Candarupa, Aticandika, Rudracanda."
20. G. Toffin, 1996, p. 74, gives the list of the Nava-Durgā for Pāṭan. B. van den Hoek, 1992, pp. 375-76 gives the names of the Nava-Durgā for the town of Kāṭhmāṇḍu.
21. Sima and Duma appear in a number of illuminated manuscripts of *Devimahatmya* under the names of Śumba and Niśumba. See P. Pal, 1978, p. 60: "In the second battle scene, Durga is seen attacking the demons Sumbha and Niśumba with a drawn sword . . . in both illustrations of the manuscript Durgā and Vishnu strike theatrical postures reminiscent of performers on a traditional stage (*yatra*)."
22. B.H. Hodgson, 1828, points out that Siṅghinī and Vyāgrinī are inferior spirits attached to the *Mātrkas*. He gives an interesting drawing on page 464 of Vajra Yogiṇī between Siṅghinī and Vyāgrinī. The drawing of the two goddesses corresponds closely to the statues that one can see today in front of Nyatapola temple.
23. J. H. Teilhet, 1978, p. 83.
24. The town of Bhaktapur is represented as a *mandala* surrounded by eight goddesses (*aṣṭamāṭrka*) and eight Bhairava (*aṣṭabhairava*) and eight Ganeśa. Outside the town limits are the cremation grounds

with the usual symbols, the *linga*, the *stūpa*, the fire. A. Macdonald, A. Vergati, 1979, p. 86: "According to learned Newar opinion, Tripurasundarī is the goddess whose residence was established at the foundation of the town of Bhaktapur." See also B. Kölver, A ritual map from Nepal in *Folia Rara*, F. Steiner, 1976, pp. 68-80.

25. R. Levy, 1992, pp. 568-69.
26. R. Levy, 1992, p. 509.
27. L. Iltis, 1987, p. 210.
28. A. Sanderson, 1985, pp. 200-1: "Thus it is that in Kashmir we find about the path of purity, a vigorous polydaemonic culture of power. The high Tantric soteoriology which obliterated the extrinsicism of Brahmanical purity in the privacy of an ecstatic, all-devouring self revelation of consciousness came out of the traditions of orders of exorcistic visionaries who, knowing the emanative clan-systems and hierarchies of the powers of impurity, freed and protect the uninitiated from their assaults and at the same time cultivated the practice of controlled possession, seeking permeation by the forms of Bhairava and Kali which stood at the centre of and controlled as their emanations the clans of these impurity-embodying and impurity addicted obsessors of the orthodox identity."
29. Hamilton, 1971(1819), p. 35.
30. G. Toffin, 1982, p. 469. *See also* G. Toffin, 1996, p. 233 and p. 245.
31. M. Postel, 1985, p. 277.
32. H. Zimmer, 1946, p. 181.
33. G. Toffin, 1996, p. 75; D. Gellner, 1992, p. 83: "... the principal deities in that festival are the Eight Mother Goddesses, the Ga Pyakha, who dance in Lalitpur; they are (none other than) the Dasamahavidya." I. Alsop, 1993, p. 55.

34. I. Alsop, 1993, p. 54.
35. I. Alsop, 1993, p. 55.
36. D. Gellner, 1992, p. 288 gives a summary of the liturgy of Cakrasamvara which shows how the yogic visualization works. "After a series of purifications and empowerments, the worshipper generates in front of himself the black six armed Samvara, without consort or attendants: this is the Convention Deity (*samayadevata*). After various protective rites, he ascends to the Akaniṣṭha heaven and, using rays from the syllable HUM in his heart, he draws the *maṇḍala* of the knowledge deity (*jñānadevata*) and fuses him with the Convention Deity already visualized."
37. D. Snellgrove, 1987, pp.154-55.
38. L. Iltis, 1987, p. 206.

## Masked Dances and the Territory of the Kingdom

HERE are three different troops of Nava-Durgā dancers in the three former Newar kingdoms of the Valley: Kāthmāṇḍu, Pātan and Bhaktapur. Even today they dance within the boundaries of their respective former Malla kingdoms. The masked dances of the Nava-Durgā are the only ritual dances which last eight and half months. They take place first inside the capital and after that in a number of other localities. These dances have a secret and highly religious aspect. The gods and goddesses represented by the group of dancers are Tantric gods: they have demoniacal aspects and are dangerous. This dangerous aspect is emphasized in the myths about the origin of these dances. According to the oral tradition, only a priest with excellent Tantric skills can control the goddesses.

In the former kingdom of Bhaktapur, the dancers must dance first in the town, on twenty-one public squares, and then, after visiting different quarters of the town, they dance in nineteen villages in the eastern part of the Valley which, in previous times, were part of the ancient kingdom of Bhaktapur. So, in a certain manner, these dances link the capital, the political centre of royalty, to other localities of the former kingdom. The Nava-Durgā dances have not only a religious



Fig. 52: The main entrance to the Nava-Durga temple at Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).

but also a political function. Chronicles give details of the inauguration by a king of the Nava-Durgā cult. "The king Ananda Malla established his court at Bhaktapur where he built a Durbar; and having one night seen and received instructions from the Navadurgā, he set up their images in proper places to ensure the security and protection of the town both internally and externally." The same king, Ānanda Malla, built a temple for the Nava-Durgā which is still in existence today in the eastern part of the town. This temple was built of wood and bricks and is similar to the "god house" temples of the goddesses inside the town. The decoration of the windows and of the principal entrance to the temple marks it out from other buildings close by.

It seems very significant that the first place visited outside Bhaktapur by the Nava-Durgā dancers is Deopātan, where the temple of Paśupatināth, the god who was the protector of the kings of the Malla dynasty (1200-1768), is situated. There they have to visit the 'stèle' marking the foundation of the old royal palace. Throughout the centuries Deopātan and the nearby Paśupatināth temple have been important political centres. Like the kings of Kāthmāṇḍu and Pātan, those of Bhaktapur formerly held political power from Paśupatināth. The villages visited outside Bhaktapur are generally within the ancient boundaries of the Malla kingdom of Bhaktapur. Even today the first place visited by the dancers in each locality outside Bhaktapur is the former residence of its territorial chief. Such local chiefs were previously subordinate to the kings of the Malla dynasty. The dancers next go to the temple of the local manifestation of the goddess, which is considered as the religious centre of the locality. In the villages of the countryside the territory is organized in a more simple manner than in the capital. There is

usually just one main temple of the goddess or a *stūpa*. When the dancers arrive in each locality the inhabitants offer them a pig, the only animal accepted in sacrifice by the Nava-Durgā. There are two ways of 'offering' the pig. On this occasion, it may be let loose so that the dancers can chase after it and catch it. This game of 'pig hunting' can last for hours and it is a source of great amusement for the public. On the other hand, the pig may be handed over directly. The sacrifice of the pig is always part of the performance and it is always carried out by the dancer representing Bhairava.

The ritual dances thus have also political significance: they are linked directly to the sovereign through the goddess Taleju. The 'power' to dance and 'life' are obtained when the dancers are consecrated by the royal goddess Taleju, the tutelary goddess of the Malla dynasty who is the tutelary goddess of the present Shah dynasty as well. Usually the specialists designate the consecration of the masks as a 'birth'. The same goddess Taleju empowers the dancers at Kāthmāndu also. Without the *mantra* of Taleju, transmitted to them by a brāhmaṇa in a secret ceremony, they cannot dance anywhere. Let us note that the 'power' to dance is given to dancers under royal patronage.

As already stated, at Bhaktapur the masked dances take place first inside the town. The date of the dance for each quarter of the town is fixed by an astrologer. "The visits to the quarters of Bhaktapur, however, start on a very auspicious date. Within the calendar of the Nava Durgā it is the only date which is not calculated according to the lunar calendar but according to the Indian solar calendar which is sidereal. The dancers move through the streets and lanes of the quarter they are supposed to visit according to a fixed schedule, the processional movement is divided by 3 to 9



Fig. 53: Statue-mask of the goddess Vārāhi in wood at Panauti (photo: A. Vergati).

stops . . . the distribution of the routes will reflect the spatial organization of the town into specific quarters with identifiable edges." Usually the winter solstice is observed ritually on 14th January and the ritual dances of Nava-Durgā will start. They dance in each part of the town to renew the links between that part of the town and the whole territory of the town.

Within the town of Bhaktapur itself the first formal visit of the dancers on the day of the winter solstice is to the eastern part of the town. When the inhabitants begin to describe the town as a *mandala* they start by the names of the eight goddesses and the first name mentioned is that of Brahmāñī, the goddess who is in the eastern part of the town. It is interesting to note that mask effigies of the five Buddha Dīpañkara are also taken out in procession and alms are given to them at the same moment. This shows that these Buddha are integrated into the local pantheon but remain subject to the power of the king. The dancers have to perform in each of the 21 parts of the town during a 24 hour cycle.

The performances usually take place during night time in front of the house of a patron who pays the dancers and gives them a meal and thus acquires merits. It is he who invites them to his quarter. After the meal they parade through the quarter, dancing ritual sequences and stopping periodically to rest, eat and drink. The audience which is composed of his neighbours is entertained by the same patron. Occasionally dancers become possessed but I shall not enter here into descriptions of this phenomena. After having visited successively different quarters of the town the ninth visit of the dancers is to Taumadhi square where is situated the temple of Ākāśa Bhairava as well as the second temple of the Nava-Durgā, the place where the brāhmaṇa of the

legend kept the goddesses.

It would seem that the dances stop during the festival of *Bisket Jātrā*, the main annual festival of Bhaktapur. During this period, the masks are put in the temple of the Nava-Durgā situated in the eastern part of the town. They are then stored in the secret part of the temple on the first floor. In all temples the Tāntric sanctuary where sacred images are kept is situated on the first floor.

As mentioned above, at the end of the fifteenth century, on the death of the king Yakṣa Malla (1428-82), the Valley of Kāthmāṇḍu was divided into three distinct kingdoms each retaining similar political structures. These structures follow the model of traditional Indian kingship. However each kingdom maintained its own pantheon and there were three different troops of Nava-Durgā dancers with different itineraries for the dancers. At Bhaktapur the links between the territory and the Nava-Durgā dances has been studied carefully. Maps have been drawn and published which indicate the itineraries followed by the dancers. In Kāthmāṇḍu and in Pātan the situation is different from that pertaining at Bhaktapur. In these two former kingdoms there has been little systematic research in this domain. Here I shall only give a few notes based on descriptions of the Nava-Durgā dances in the former kingdoms of Pātan and Kāthmāṇḍu. To illustrate the links between the villages and the capital in the former kingdom of Pātan, I quote a description of Nava-Durgā dances:

Let us consider the Nava Durgā troop from the village of Theco in the district of Patan. This troop does not simply perform twice a year in its village. Every year, at Dasai, the troop went up to Patan (and still goes there) with its musicians in order to dance in the



Fig. 54: The Aṣṭamātrka (eight mother-goddesses) temple at Panauti (photo: A. Vergati).

streets of the town and in the Mulchok, the principal courtyard in the ancient Royal Palace. The performers were offered many blood sacrifices and had to drink the blood of the animals (rams and buffalos) offered to them. On the tenth day of the festival, they paid their respects to the goddess Maheshvari, a goddess associated with royalty, and offered her, as a pledge of fecundity, a lemon (*tahsi*), a typical element in Newar ritual festivities.

It has already been mentioned that the cult of the goddess Harasiddhi is associated with the dance called *jala phyakha*. It would seem that the Malla kings of Pātan ordered the troop of dancers from Harasiddhi to come in front of their Royal Palace in the cold weather so that they could watch the performance. Every twelve years, the troop used to move from locality to locality in the Valley to perform at the invitation of the Śākta devotees. The origin of this custom, called in Newari *mu phyakha*, goes back to the sixteenth century: and it is still observed today. These dances extended the power of Harasiddhi and increased her influence. So that the whole of Kāthmāndu Valley became subject to her action. The cult of the goddess Harasiddhi was particularly important in the Valley because it was linked to water. The goddess is also called Jaladhya, the goddess of water. According to some

inhabitants of the Valley, Jaladhyā is an incarnation of Phulcoki Mai, the goddess whom farmers of the Valley worship in periods of drought, at the summit of the hill called Phulcoki. Legends also mention the inauguration of a well at Harasiddhi by an aspect of the goddess Jaladhyā. The elephant Kisi, one of the main figures in the dance troop, is said to have been delegated in the first instance by the king of the *nāgas* who, as is well-known in the legendary history of the Valley, resided in former times in the lake which covered the whole Valley. Rituals also emphasize these links. Once a year, in the months of July and August, dancers from Harasiddhi bathe fully

**Fig. 55: Statue Mask in wood of the goddess Brahmāyāni, temple at Panauti. (photo: A. Vergati).**



August, dancers from Harasiddhi bathe fully dressed in a reservoir the bottom of which, it is said, consists of a platform (*dabu*) for ceremonial dances. Every twelve years the dancers from Harasiddhi activate symbolically the irrigation courses of the Valley by opening and closing the Godavari cisterns at the foot of Phulcoki hill.

Finally here are a few remarks about the Nava-Durgā dances in Kāthmāṇdu. First the dancers visit the area of the former Royal Palace, Hanumān Dhokā and they perform inside the palace compound. "In addition they have thirty more destinations, in the Upper and the Lower part of the town of Kathmandu, but also in other parts of the Valley. However they will only go where they are provided for (i.e. with a sacrifice) a condition which led to the dropping of 10 out of the 31 projected destinations. The relationship with the dancing teams of Kirtipur and Bhaktapur is peculiar. If need be, the Gathu dancers of Kirtipur and Kathmandu can assist each other and even exchange dancers. Such a relationship is non-existent with Bhaktapur. The Kathmandu dancers do however visit the court of Bhaktapur as well as that of Patan. The Kirtipur dancers visit Hanuman Dhoka, but their visit is not returned by the dancers of Kathmandu." This short note on the Nava-Durgā dances for the kingdom of Kāthmāṇdu bears trace of the hierarchy of different localities such as Kāthmāṇdu and Kirtipur and illustrates the supremacy of the kingdom of Kāthmāṇdu which at the end of the eighteenth century became the capital of the new kingdom of Nepal. The troop of dancers of Nava-Durgā of Kāthmāṇdu have to visit the other two former capitals Pātan and Bhaktapur. First the dances will be performed inside the town of Kāthmāṇdu. During the festival of *Indra Jātrā* the

**Fig. 56: Dancer representing the goddess Brahmāyaṇi at Kathmandu during the festival of Dasai (or Dashara), 1993 (photo: G. Krauskopff). →**





**Fig. 57:** Dancer representing the goddess Brahmāṇī dancing with Gaṇeśa, in the streets of Kathmandu during Dashara, 1993 (photo: G. Krauskopff).

Nava-Durgā dancers make a round of Kāthmāṇḍu town when they follow the same route as that of the goddess Kumārī.

It seems that during the sixteenth century it was the king Amara Malla of Kāthmāṇḍu who established the dance of the goddess Mahālakṣmī in the village Khokana, in the former kingdom of Pātan.<sup>11</sup> The same king Amara Malla re-established the dance of the goddess Harasiddhi, first introduced by the king Vikramāditya of Ujjain.<sup>12</sup> We see that the ritual dances were inaugurated by kings just as were festivals. To worship a new deity could also be the consequence of a royal decision. It was by such means as masked dances that kings established links between the centres where their capitals were situated and the localities at the periphery of their kingdoms. Dances fulfilled a political function in controlling the king's domain.



Fig. 58: Dancer representing Gaṇeśa, Kathmandu, 1993. (photo: G. Krauskopff).



Fig. 59: Dancer representing Bhairava in the main courtyard of the Royal Palace at Patan. 1993. (photo: G. Krauskopff).

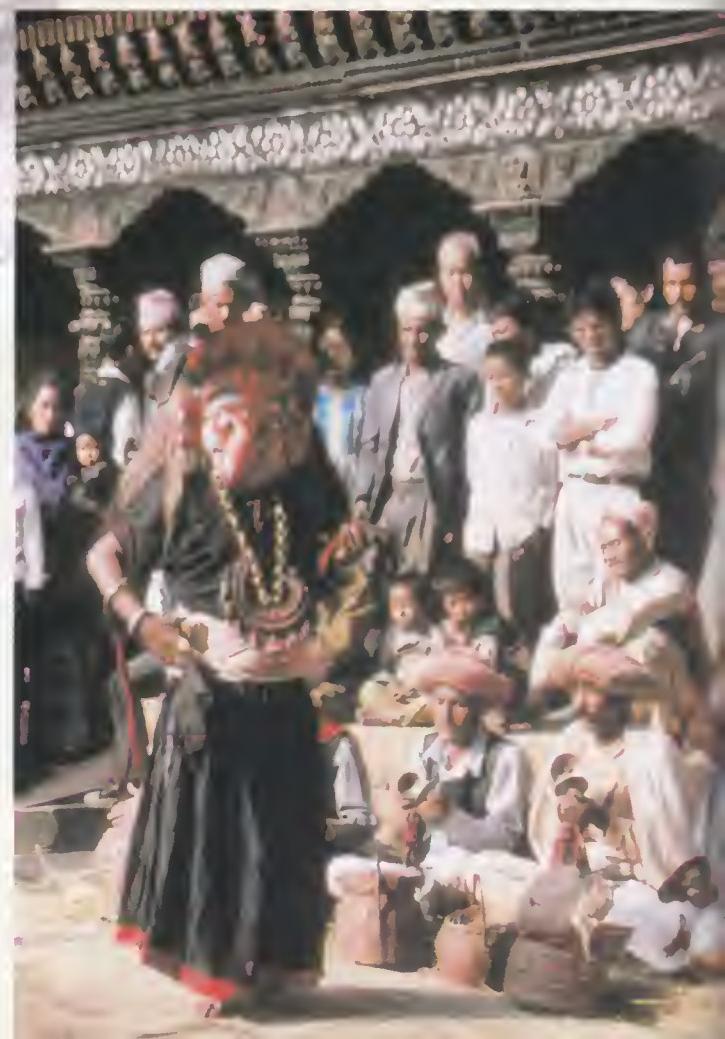


Fig. 60: Ritual dance performed in Patan in the main courtyard of the Royal Palace, 1993. It can be noticed that the dancer wears a long skirt with red hems, typically worn by Newar women in the Kathmandu valley (photo: G. Krauskopff).

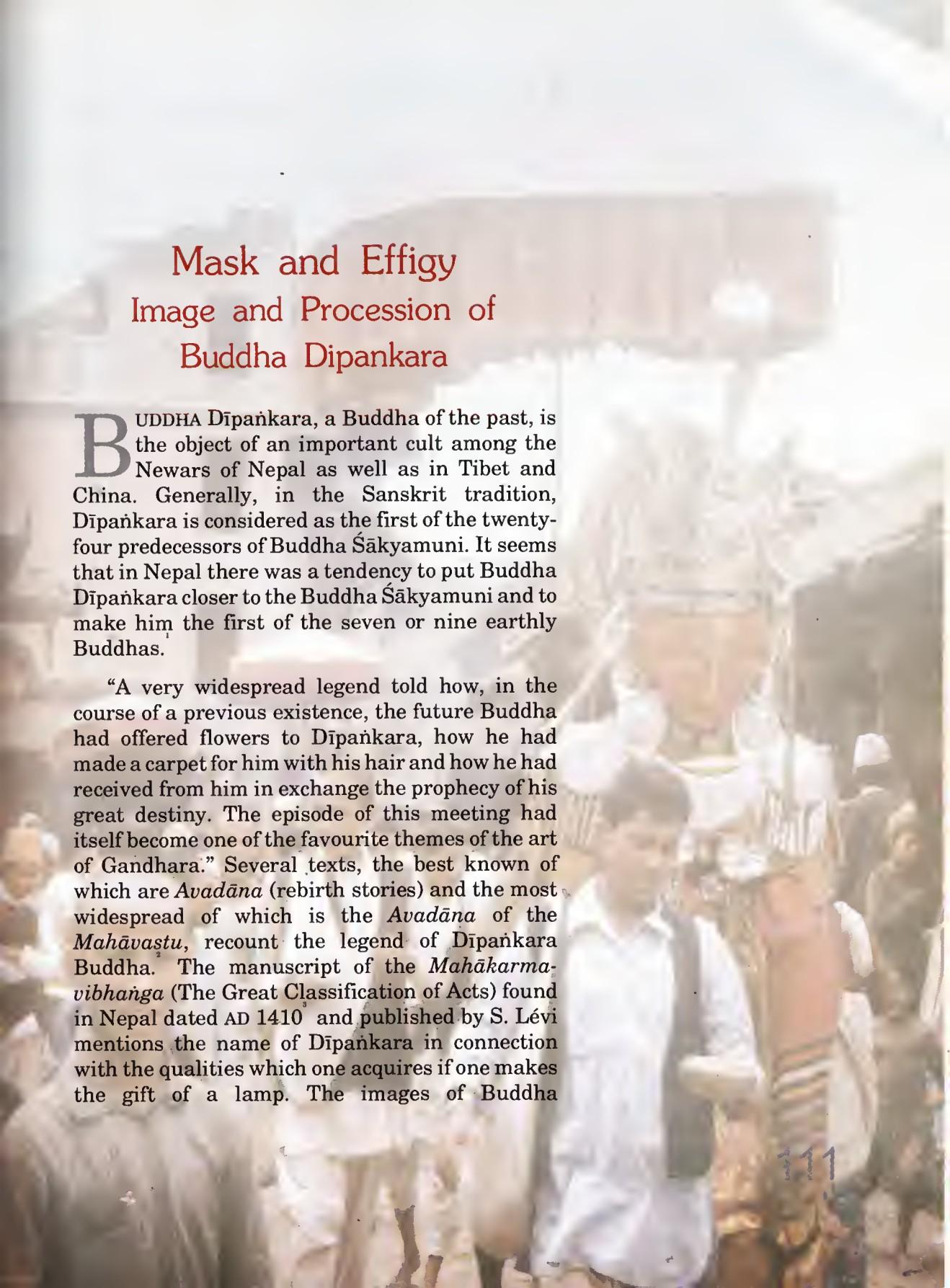
Chronicles as well as oral tradition bear witness to the fact that the Nava-Durgā gods and goddesses were charged with protecting localities inside the kingdom as well as the territory of the kingdom as a whole. At Bhaktapur the dances are considered as forming a protective *yantra* for the whole town, just as the dance performances in a local area mark out a protective space for it. “The pattern traced by dancers both outside and within the city are considered to form a protective *yantra* in the same way as the pattern of the dance performance in a local area marks out a protective space.”<sup>13</sup>

The element characteristic of the Nava-Durgā gods is their concern with protecting localities inside and outside city limits. These two categories of inside (new. *pine*) and outside (new. *dune*) are very important for understanding the Newar concept of space and for a great number of Tantric rituals. It is very significant that the dancers only wear their masks when they perform inside the limits of the town of Bhaktapur. When the dancers go beyond the town limits they take off the masks and carry them.<sup>14</sup>

## References

1. N. Gutschow, 1987, p. 149 gives a list of the places outside Bhaktapur visited by the dancers: they are all located in the east part of the Valley within the limits of the former kingdom of Bhaktapur. *See also*, K. Stürzbecher, 1981, p. 173.
2. D. Wright, 1877, p. 163. *See also* B.J. Hasrat, 1970, p. 49: “Afterwards Ananda Malla built a palace in Bhaktapur or Bhatgaon where he beheld the nine Durgas whose images he placed in a temple.”
3. Stürzbecher, 1981, pp. 174-75.
4. N. Gutschow, 1987, pp. 156-57

5. N. Gutschow, 1987, p. 149 *See also* B. van den Hoek, 1992, p. 375.
6. N. Gutschow, 1987, pp. 152-63. *See also* N. Gutschow, 1996, p. 209: "The movement is centrifugal, starting again and again from the centre of the square but it could also encircle an entire block."
7. N. Gutschow, 1987, p. 147 see map 7 with the sequences of visits of 21 quarters and p. 155 map 8 : Processional routes in the quarters of Bhaktapur.
8. G. Toffin, 1992, p. 178.
9. *Ibid.*
10. B. Van den Hoek, 1991, p. 388.
11. S. Lévi, 1905, vol. II, p. 35.
12. *Ibid.*
13. R. Levy, 1987, p. 126 : "Only few specialists in the city among the Brahmans and Gatha performers are aware of the places and sequences in the larger cycle. All the vast majority of the spectators of local performances know is that somehow the local performance weaves their locality into a larger pattern of temporal and spatial relationships during the annual cycle, a pattern centering on the city."
14. N. Gutschow, 1987, p. 164: "The dancers wear the masks only when they 'enter' the town, stepping across the threshold of an ancient gate which clearly defines the outer boundary of urban space."



## Mask and Effigy Image and Procession of Buddha Dipankara

BUDDHA Dīpañkara, a Buddha of the past, is the object of an important cult among the Newars of Nepal as well as in Tibet and China. Generally, in the Sanskrit tradition, Dīpañkara is considered as the first of the twenty-four predecessors of Buddha Śākyamuni. It seems that in Nepal there was a tendency to put Buddha Dīpañkara closer to the Buddha Śākyamuni and to make him the first of the seven or nine earthly Buddhas.

"A very widespread legend told how, in the course of a previous existence, the future Buddha had offered flowers to Dīpañkara, how he had made a carpet for him with his hair and how he had received from him in exchange the prophecy of his great destiny. The episode of this meeting had itself become one of the favourite themes of the art of Gandhara." Several texts, the best known of which are *Avadāna* (rebirth stories) and the most widespread of which is the *Avadāna* of the *Mahāvastu*, recount the legend of Dīpañkara Buddha. The manuscript of the *Mahākarmavibhaṅga* (The Great Classification of Acts) found in Nepal dated AD 1410 and published by S. Lévi mentions the name of Dīpañkara in connection with the qualities which one acquires if one makes the gift of a lamp. The images of Buddha



Fig. 61: Procession of the effigies of Buddha Dīpañkara in the month of August at Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).

Dīpañkara in the eleventh century (AD 1015) manuscript of the *Aṣṭasahasrika Prajña-pāramitā*, carry inscriptions: two of these are from Ceylon and two from Java. But no Newar painting from the Malla epoch represents Dīpañkara; and this despite the fact that we know today a considerable number of Newar paintings representing Buddhist subjects which are indeed more numerous than the surviving paintings dealing with Hindu subjects.

In Nepal, Dīpañkara is the only one of the Buddhas of the past to

whom a cult is addressed and representations of whom can be observed frequently. Dīpañkara has come to be associated with the virtues of Buddhist alms-giving. “The principal scripture related to him in Nepal is called *Kapisāvadana*. . . . Rather than devotion, the *Kapisāvadana* stresses the importance of feeding and giving alms to the Monastic community, but then makes the same connection between doing this and future Buddhahood. In imitating King Sarvānanda, the main protagonist of the *Kapisāvadana*, with their devotion to Dīpañkara and the Monastic Community, Newar Buddhists are implicitly starting on the same path to Buddhahood themselves.” The text *Kapisāvadana*, an eulogium on charity, begins with the story of the monkey Jñanakara (mine of knowledge). “Once upon a time Tatavisuta was born a monkey,

Jñanakara by name. In consequence of his sinful character the whole forest was beset with darkness at the time of his birth, and famine raged on all sides. Sometime after Dīpañkara presence in the forest it to light and there was plenty of everything. Jñanakara wondering at this sudden change, gave a jack fruit to the worker of miracle. Dīpañkara gave him instructions in the philosophy of Buddhism, and promised a transformation in a man. He learned the character of man from a friend, and dying, was born a merchant's son at Kamarthi. He was Dharmasrī. When Dharmasrī was very young, Dīpañkara who was passing by, asked him to give the applicant anything that he could afford with good will. Dharmasrī gave a handful of dust which was instantly changed into gold. He gave another handful of dust, which was changed into dainties for the Sangha." The story of the young boy Dharamsri whose gift of dust turned into gold shows that it is the intention which counts when making gifts and reveals the ancient Buddhist morality of intention.

Fig. 62: Face-mask of Buddha Dīpañkara during the annual festival in the month of August at Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).



Dīpañkara is the only Buddha represented by a mask which is red: it is not worn by a man but is fixed on a wooden effigy. During the procession of the effigies of Buddha Dīpañkara which takes place in the sacred month of the Buddhists *Gumla* (August) when all Buddhist festivals are celebrated, the effigies are carried by former monks, *śākyā*. The festival is called *pañcadāna* and the alms offered are known as *pañcadāna*. There are three different processions in the three former capitals of the Valley at different dates; at Bhaktapur the procession of Dīpañkara Buddha takes place three weeks later than in Pātan. The difference between the dates when the ceremony takes place in these towns is perhaps linked to the fact that in former times there were three different kingdoms.

The effigy is placed on a wooden framework with 'arms' which is covered by a colourful dress; the dimensions are impressive — the whole construction measures approximately two meters in height. The clothes are similar to those worn at certain ceremonies by Buddhist priests *vajrācārya*. The head-mask is made in papier maché and is crowned by a diadem. The main difference with other masks is that Buddha Dīpañkara's head-masks are not destroyed after each procession : they are replastered and repainted in the same way as the statue of Red Avalokiteśvara in Pātan and serve again the following year. Some of these rituals of reconsecration are held in the Tantric shrine of the monastery.

At Bhaktapur the five effigies of Dīpañkara Buddha are kept in the five main Buddhist monasteries of the town. When they are carried around the town by *śākyā* and *vajrācārya*, the procession stops several times, the last stop taking place in front of the temple of the royal goddess

Taleju. The participants have to pay homage to the royal goddess Taleju before leaving the town. Only the inhabitants of the town who are Buddhists take part in the procession of the five Buddha Dipaṅkara. They offer alms to the *vajrācārya* and *sākyā*. The *vajrācārya* in turn touch the forehead of the alms-giver with the sacred book which they carry. "In all types of alms-giving the main gift is a mixture of husked and unhusked rice. To this is sometimes added rice boiled in milk, *khir*. That uncooked rice is meant as a substitute for the more truly monastic gift of cooked rice is suggested by the etymology of the word *pancadan*: it does not come from *panca* 'five' (a meaning it has come to have in the minds of many, no doubt because of the importance of the number five in Tantric Buddhism) but from *punya-ja* (merit boiled rice), *pinda ja* (balls of boiled rice)."

A festival called *samyak* is celebrated once every five years in Pāṭan and once every twelve years in Kāthmāṇdu: the statues of Buddha Dipaṅkara are displayed on that occasion and alms are offered to monks and *vajrācārya*. An optional *samyak* can also be performed when it is financed by a rich donor: it consists mainly in distribution of money and food to former members of the monastic community. "The procession of *sākyā* and *vajrācārya* can start up again at any time if there is a charitable purse to pay the cost. It consists basically in a distribution of money and food to the *vanra* (monastic community) and puts in memory the time when the residents of the *viharas*, as true *bhiksus*, lived from alms. If it is a private individual who offers the *yatra* he summons by personal invitations the *banra* of the town or even the whole Valley to a *samyak sambhojana* (body feast). The expenses can be heavy as sometimes the number of those present can be as many as ten thousand. Moreover the



Fig. 63: Mask of Buddha Dipaṅkara in *papier maché* during the annual festival in the month of August at Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).

festival includes amusements and illuminations. The king must be present or send a personal representative and this is again an honour which has a price for he must be offered a silver throne, a parasol and cooking utensils. Facing the house of the donor is erected a wooden scaffolding with a shelter opening on to the road; the whole is decorated with hangings and brilliantly lit. The helmet of Amitābha from Svayambunāth, which the *vajrācārya* come to worship, is brought. Then the procession starts; beforehand, along the houses that the cortege of the *banras* is to pass, is made a covered path separated from the road by a wooden barrier and which crosses each cross-roads by a bridge. The wives of the Buddhists who want to join in the festival arrive beforehand in their best dresses, flowers stuck in their hair and with baskets filled with foodstuffs, to take up position on the road which the procession is to follow: each

*banra* who passes in the file receives fruit, grain or money. When the baskets are emptied, it is up to the patron to fill the gaps. Here and there groups of grown men or young boys pour water respectfully onto the feet of the *banras*."

It seems important to draw attention to the red colour of Dīpañkara's mask. In Nepal one of the most popular *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara is also depicted in red. It seems there is a long tradition in Nepal of representing Avalokiteśvara with a red face. In an eleventh-century manuscript, mentioned above, Avalokiteśvara is depicted in this manner. He can be also an assistant of Buddha Dīpañkara. In Nepal Buddha Dīpañkara is part of a triad formed by Dīpañkara (the Buddha of the past), Śākyamuni (the Buddha of this age) and Maitreya (the future Buddha). This triad can be seen during the sacred month of Buddhists in the main courtyard of a number of monasteries in Pātan: "This triad is surely intended in three monasteries (*bahi*) of Guita (Patan). The smallest and oldest has a north-facing Maitri Bodhisattva (Maitreya) as main deity, the next-door Guita Bahi has an east-facing Shakyamuni, and the larger Tadha Bahi has a north-facing Dīpañkara."

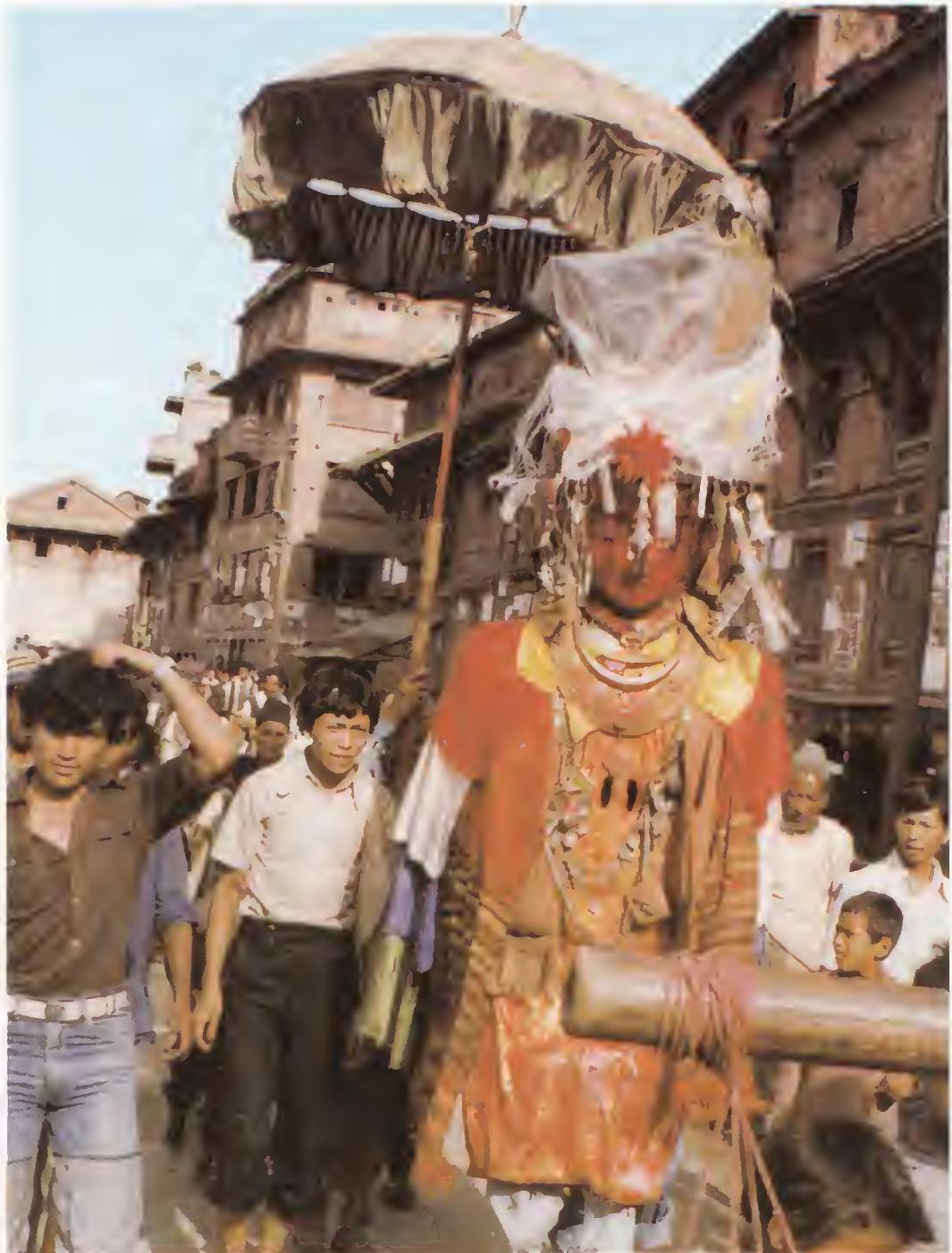
The Buddha Dīpañkara is known among other names as 'grandfather god' (*ajudyah*). The statues of Buddha Dīpañkara are usually kept in the monastery on the first floor. Exceptionally they are to be found in the main shrine as in Pātan or in Bhaktapur. According to oral tradition Dīpañkara Buddha arrived in Nepal from the East, from Mahācīna and from a town called Dipavati Nagar. In the *Mahāvastu*, the text mentioned above, it is said that the Dīpañkara is the son of king Arcimat, the king of Dipavatī. "The royal town of Dipavati was encircled by seven bright and gleaming railings of the seven precious substances, gold,

silver, pearl, beryl, crystal, white coral and ruby.”<sup>12</sup> In the text Dipavatī is presented as an ideal town of a *cakravartin* and the story of Dīpañkara is similar to the well-known story of Buddha Śākyamuni. Other Buddhist deities such as Mañjuśrī, the creator of the Valley, came also from the east, Mahācīna. In the eleventh-century manuscript, mentioned above, the image of Dīpañkara at Jāvā shows him with Āyalokiteśvara on his left and Mañjuśrī on his right.

There are a certain number of statues of painted wood which represent Buddha Dīpañkara standing: he is draped in a robe leaving the right shoulder uncovered, wearing a crown and making the gesture of the *abhaya-mudrā* and the *vara-mudrā*. These gestures are directly influenced by Pāla tradition. The statues are painted in many colours, the robe and the ornamentation are in embossed copper. The crown reminds one of that of the Newar kings of the Malla period. It can be compared to certain representations of kings at the end of the seventeenth century such as that of Siddhinarasimha Malla in the painting from the beginning of XVIIth century which depicts the legend of Red Avalokiteśvara (or Karuṇāmaya). The clothing leaving the right shoulder uncovered reminds one of monks' robes but its lower part, with the folds in the skirt and the decoration of the material, is again similar to the costume of Malla kings in seventeenth-century paintings. The jewellery and the clothing draw attention to the royal appearance of the statutes of Buddha Dīpañkara. These statues and the cult are in fact quite recent and date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>13</sup>

Today in Nepal the essential aspect of the cult of Buddha Dīpankara is its association with alms-giving. For the Buddhist laymen the procession is an occasion for offering alms to the former

Fig. 64: Procession of the effigies of Buddha Dīpañkara in the month of August at Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati). →



monastic community. "The Buddhist clergy, like their colleagues of the 'unorthodox' sects could not subsist without the willing help of the Indian population. A monk is by definition a beggar (*bhikshu*): he cannot own anything and he cannot work for profit. He must live on the charity of laymen, and, in India, this was never refused to him. For an Indian, the *sramana brahmana* the *pravrajita* whatever be his beliefs and practices is indeed considered as an excellent "field of merit" (*punyaaksetra*) causing the gift which is shown there to multiply a hundred-fold. In counterpart, the monk responded to the generosity lavished on him by providing religious instruction: the 'gift of the Law' (*dharmañadana*) compensated the 'material gift'.

It is obvious that there are many points in common between the legend of Śākyamuni and that of Dīpankara. The offerings to the ancient community no longer are made every day. The offerings made nowadays exceptionally during festivals and ceremonies continue to provide the layman with the opportunity of acquiring merits.

### References

1. A. Foucher, 1900, pp. 79-84.
2. E. Senart, *Mahāvastu*, 1899, vol. I, pp.193-252.
3. S. Lévi, 1932, p.
4. The manuscript was published by A. Foucher, 1900, p. 79.
5. D. Gellner, 1992, p. 184.
6. R. Mitra, 1882, p. 100.
7. D. Gellner, 1992, p. 182.
8. S. Lévi, 1905, vol.II, pp. 52-53. This description of the festival was written at the end of the nineteenth century.

9. A. Foucher, 1900, p. 98. "On all these miniatures paintings Avalokiteśvara is represented with a fair complexion except in Nepal where he is red . . . Among the standing images of Avalokiteśvara in human form, a special place must be made for the two Nepalese idols represented in miniatures I, 6 and II, 4. They have in common that, with one exception, they are all red."
10. A. Getty, 1928, pp.12-15; D. Gellner, 1992, p. 186.
11. D. Gellner, 1992, p. 186.
12. The *Mahāvastu*, vol. I, ed. by J. Jones, London, Luzac, 1949, p. 153.
13. A. Foucher, 1900, p. 79.
14. A. Vergati, 1995, p. 193. Slusser, 1982, vol. II plate 484, pp. 500, 501.
15. M. Slusser Shepherd, 1982, p. 293 the statue of Dīpankara mentioned with an undated inscription could be of the thirteenth century.
16. E. Lamotte, 1976, pp. 72-73.



## The Ritual Making of the Masks

THE masks are made ritually by members of the caste of painters (*citrakārs*). The religious images have to be made in conformity with the prescriptions laid down in local manuals of iconography. The painters have at their homes their own copy of such sketch-books which serve as 'aide mémoires'. In a sketch-book belonging to a painter from Bhaktapur, and which is in the form of a folding book, all the dimensions, the colours, and the attributes are given for the images of the different gods and goddesses of Bhaktapur. It is impossible for a painter to break the rules for the painting of a religious image. If the rules of iconography are not respected, a deity can become a demoniacal force. It is already well-known to Indologists that many Sanskrit texts, based on ancient traditions transmitted orally, deal with iconography and iconometry: these texts are called *śilpaśāstras* and they treat of image-making along with architecture. For each particular deity, these works indicate the exact proportions for parts of the body, the appropriate posture, the attributes, the gesture of the hands (*mudrā*) and the appropriate animal mount (*vāhana*). J. Banerjea has written in his work on Hindu iconography: "A well-executed image, if it follows the rules of proportion laid down in the *shilpashastras* and is pleasing to the eye, invites the deity to reside in it and is particularly

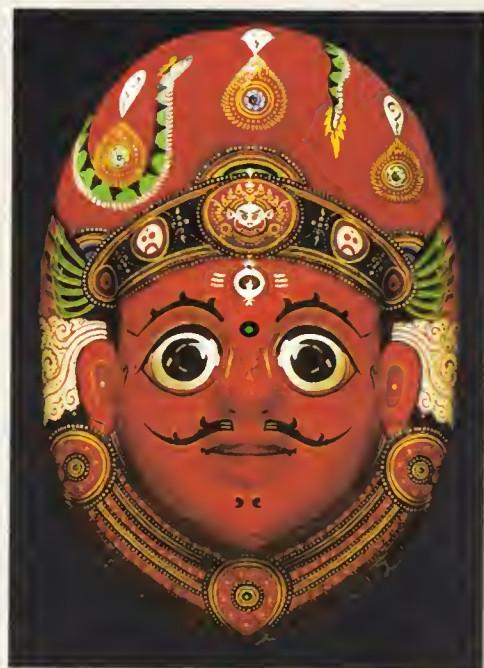


Fig. 65: A Mask of Lord Siva — The chief of Nava Durgā dancers, in *papier maché* (photo: Thomas Ozoux).



Fig. 66: The sketch book of a painter of Bhaktapur (photo: A. Vergati).

auspicious to the worshipper."

The creation of a religious image involves a religious discipline. Both Hindu and Buddhist texts tell how an artist should purify his mind before beginning to paint. In spite of the fact that the painters in traditional Newar society are members of low-ranking castes — as are all artisans in their society — they pass through a religious 'initiation' (*dekhā* or *dīkṣā*), a

ritual initiation generally reserved to members of high castes. For the painters this initiation is different from that of members of high castes, but after having received it they have the right to enter a Tantric sanctuary and see the Tantric deity which is inside it.

Priests have access to *sādhanā*, texts describing particular deities. The *sādhanā* takes the form of a manuscript or printed text which may be in Sanskrit or Newari or, most frequently, in a mixture of both languages. The same text serves also for invoking the deity mentally during religious meditations or rituals. It should be mentioned that the painters have to 'open the eyes' (*dr̥ṣti kankegu*) of the deities painted on religious images. The painters also have to paint the eyes of Bhairava on the wheels of the processional chariot (*ratha*) of Red Avalokiteśvara in Pātan. According to the classical Indian texts, only a *Brahman* can open the eyes of an image or a statue; this is not only a ritual but also a religious act. The painter's sketch-book from Bhaktapur mentioned above does not contain iconometric measurements. One finds in it drawings of gods and goddesses;

alongside these are notes with their names in Newari and sometimes in Sanskrit; the colours in which they should be painted are indicated. A painter who makes religious images knows at what dates and for which festivals particular paintings should be made. There are a considerable number of folding books of iconographic drawings : one of the earliest books is from the first half of the fifteenth century. If a Newar painter follows strict rules for making images, the image-maker in a 'tribal context' has, on the contrary, more liberty of expression and can use his imagination more freely.

The masks of the Nava-Durgā, in Bhaktapur as well as in Kāthmāndu are made every year in the month of August in great secret. They are destroyed by burning. This starts in the months of April-May before the rainy season on a special day called in Newari, *Sithinakha*, when ponds and wells are cleaned out all over the Valley. In the town of Bhaktapur when the masks are burned, their ashes are hidden in a clay pot which is then put in the river Hanumante. These ashes will be incorporated in the new masks which are made in the following month of August, one month before the festival of the Great Goddess, Dasaim or *Dussehra*. The cremation of the masks is done in secret in Bhaktapur whereas in Kāthmāndu as well as in Kīrtipur it is a public event.

The ceremony in the course of which new 'life' is given to the masks has often been described as a 'birth'; and the cremation of the masks has been described as their 'death'. It is only after the ceremony of 'birth' that the deities are considered to be present in the masks. In Bhaktapur and in Kāthmāndu the ceremony is the same. It would be more appropriate to speak of the 'consecration' of the masks rather than of their 'birth'. On the tenth

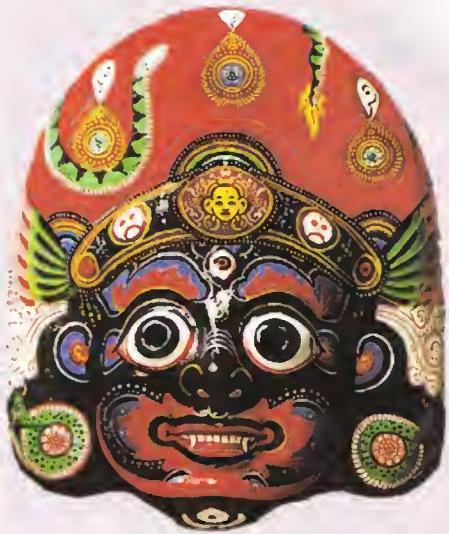


Fig. 67: Mask of Bhairava in *papier maché* (photo: Thomas Ozoux).

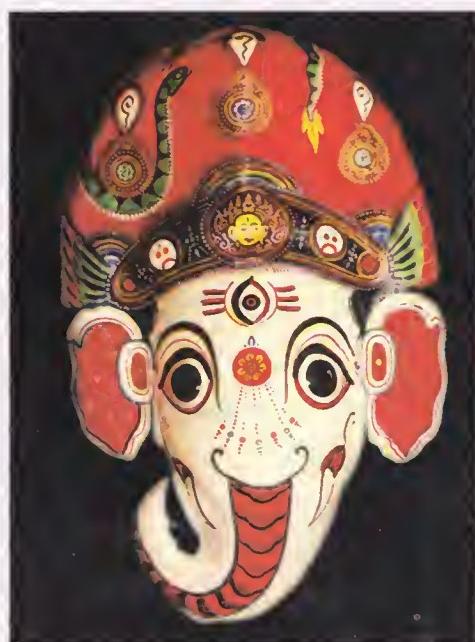


Fig. 68: Gaṇeśa (photo: Thomas Ozoux).

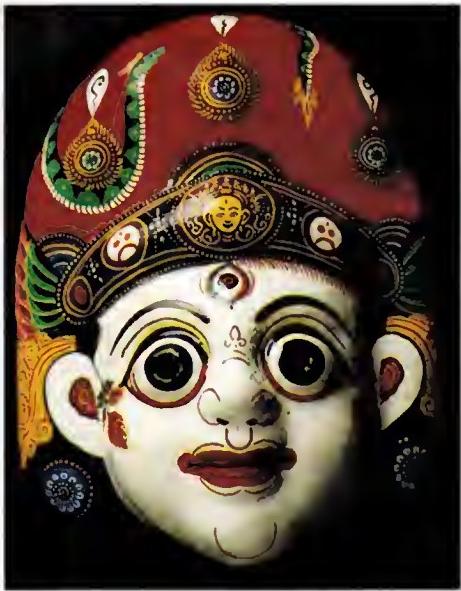


Fig. 69: Māheśvarī  
(photo: Thomas Ozoux).

day of the festival of the goddess, in the evening, the dancers, members of the caste of gardeners, carrying the masks in their arms, go to the temple of the royal goddess Taleju, which is in the main courtyard of the Palace. During a secret ceremony in the presence of a Newar brāhmaṇa, the goddess Taleju also gives 'life' and the 'power' to dance to the masks. A procession will start, with musicians, two brāhmaṇas and another musician who carries in front of the masks the head of the buffalo sacrificed on the ninth day of the festival of Dasaim. The dancers will collect sacred flowers which are placed along their road by people of the locality. On the thirteenth day of the festival of the goddess, they have to pay homage to the goddess Taleju again, and during an elaborate ceremony, the first pig will be sacrificed. This sacrifice of a pig can only be made for 'demons'. The pig is considered as 'impure' food : only untouchables can eat such meat.

The masks of the Nava Durgā dancer at Theco, formerly part of the kingdom of Patan, are not destroyed annually after the troupe's performance as is the case at Bhaktapur and at Kāthmāṇḍu. They are repaired, replastered and repainted every year. Usually they are stored in the temple of Nava Durgā in Theco. Every twelve years, however, at the time of the major festival of Theco new masks are made: and the old masks are not destroyed but stored in the attic of the local temple. During the performance every twelfth year, a ritual transfers the 'divine power' from the eleven open sanctuaries of goddesses surrounding Kāthmāṇḍu to the masks held in the Theco temple. This ritual is to that which transfers the 'life' and 'power' to dance to the Nava Durgā masks in Bhaktapur and to the ritual performed annually to the statue of Avalokiteśvara in Pātan.

The new masks are made by a painter from Pātan and are consecrated by a Tantric priest. At this time, a fire sacrifice (*homa*) is performed at a certain distance from the temple and animals, serpents and birds, are sacrificed and consumed by the fire. The main purpose of the fire sacrifice is to give 'life' to the masks and dancers.

The masks are made of clay mixed with bits of cotton and a gum-like paste made from wheat-flour. This mixture is prepared by a painter and then separated into thirteen parts. Each part is placed over a low-relief mould which has been covered with a clean black cloth. One of the painters presses the flattened clay with his fingers so that it conforms to the contours of the mould. The clay mask forms are left to dry on the moulds for about four days. Later the masks are painted with a mixture of boiled wheat-flour, water and animal glue which dries to an almost opaque finish. For the painters and the devotees each colour which is associated with a mask has a different significance: red is associated with animal sacrifices and anger, blue black with energy and power; and white with male semen, purity and death. Previously, the Newar painters used vegetable and mineral colours. Indigo and carmine used to be imported from India and Indian gum served as agglutinative. Today the painters use mainly chemical colours from India. The painters in Bhaktapur usually work in their houses on the second floor, alone or with the help of their children and family.

How could be explained the colours of the masks worn by the Nava Durgā dancers? I have shown in the chapter on the pantheon that each mother goddess was related to a particular cardinal point and had a colour specific to her role. The Nava Durgā, the demoniacal forms of these

Fig. 70: Kaumārī  
(photo: Thomas Ozoux).

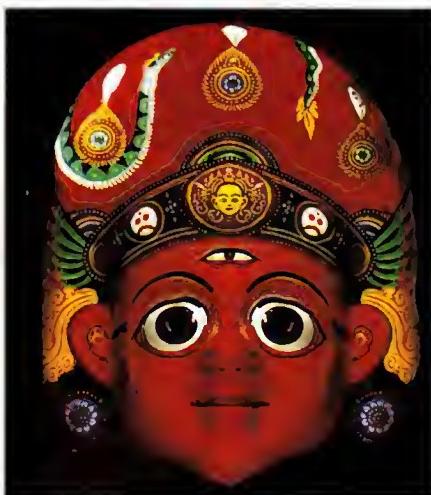


goddesses, are modeled on the patterns of colours. As in the *mandala*, each goddess is linked to a direction in space and to a particular colour.

The masks of the Nava-Durgā worn by the dancers are loaded with iconographical details. The third eye is prominently displayed on the foreheads of Śiva, Mahākālī and Bhairava, Gaṇeśa, Māheśvarī and Vaiṣṇavī and also on the Vaiṣṇavite goddess, Vārāhī. Kumārī has the same size and shape as the benign goddesses, Māheśvarī, Indrāṇī, Brahmāṇī and Vaiṣṇavī; she is figured as a young woman. During the performances she has a marginal role. Two masks dominate by their size and by their dark colour: one of these is that of Bhairava, the main actor in the ceremonies, the sacrificer of the pig; and the other is the dark blood-red Mahākālī, who is represented with emaciated flesh and accentuated facial bones as in all the representations of Mahākālī locally called Cāmuṇḍā. The only mask which lacks the mark on the forehead is Seto (or Seta 'white') Bhairava. His face is not demoniacal; he is supposed to represent Śiva in his aspect of 'a young bachelor'. He is one of the main performers among the dancers. During the dance with the goddess Mahākālī, which is the most spectacular dance sequence, the young men and boys of the audience will identify themselves with Seto Bhairava. When Seto Bhairava goes fishing he tries to catch somebody from the audience. It is the older boys and young men who play the part of the fish. The audience participate in the performance: they tease and shout while Seto Bhairava chases the young boys to catch one of them who will become the 'fish'.

Like the statues, both Hindu and Buddhist, all the masks have a 'third eye', a mark on the forehead. The iconography shows that not only gods and goddesses but also the demons have the

Fig. 71: Indrāyanī  
(photo: Thomas Ozoux)



third eye which both enlightens and destroys. In the *Siva Purāṇa* which gives details for the decoration of the body of Śiva at his wedding with Pārvatī, it is said that the moon became the bridegroom's crown and his third eye became a beautiful *tilaka* on his forehead. According to the Newars the black *tikā* put on the forehead of the dancers signifies that the deities are 'inside' them and they can then start to wear the masks and to dance. These marks on the forehead are usually associated with the third eye.

Masks are not only to be distinguished one from another by their forms and by their colours but also by their head-gears. The goddess Mahākālī is crowned with a complicated, multicoloured structure and wears large earrings, as do Bhairava, Vārāhī, Sima and Duma. The other goddesses, such as Brahmāṇī, Indrāṇī, Vaiṣṇavī and Māheśvarī, all wear what look like hair nets rather than crowns. In the upper part of the head-gears, and directly above the third eye, is painted a mirror. The only exception to these iconographic rules is Seto Bhairava who does not have a head-gear but wears a simple head-band. From an iconographic point of view a major difference between the masks of the Kāthmāndu Valley and those of the so-called 'tribals' seems to be the absence of head-gears among the latter. It is however true that these 'tribal masks' are at present little studied.

The dances of the Nava-Durgā in all localities of the Valley are linked to the agricultural cycle and in particular to rice production. The masked dances cease during the monsoon; as mentioned above the masks are burnt before the monsoon starts and they 'come to life' in the month of September, during the festival of *Dussehra*.

The masked dances of the Nava-Durgā begin

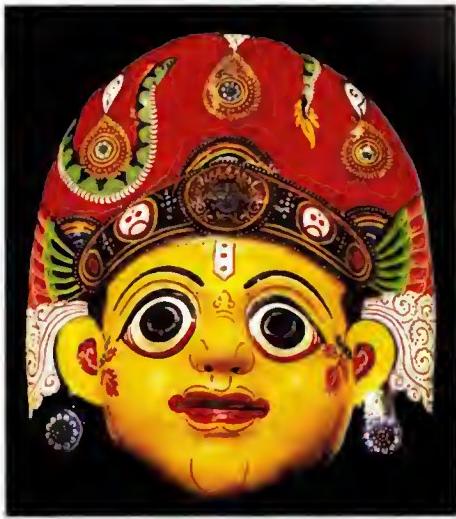


Fig. 72: Brahmayāṇi  
(photo: Thomas Ozoux).

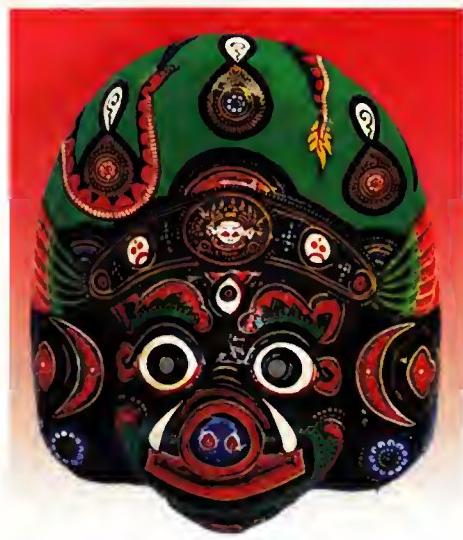


Fig. 73: Vārāhi  
(photo: Thomas Ozoux).

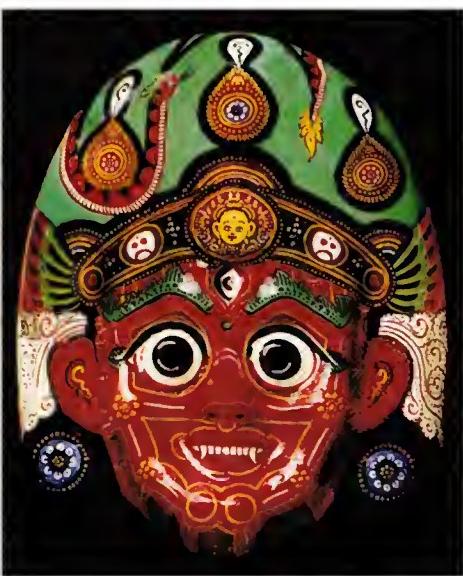


Fig. 74: Mahākālī  
(photo: Thomas Ozoux).

under the control of the royal goddess Taleju who alone can give ‘power’ in the sense of ‘life’ to the masks. In a manner similar to that employed in the case of a statue or painting, a mask worn by a dancer must be animated. Hindu sacred images are lifeless until ceremonies of consecration and installation are performed. The ritual of invocation called *āvāhana* is performed in other rituals: it serves to invite a god or goddess to a ceremony. “The real presence of the deity in her image is ritually ascertained by the performance of the sixteen ‘services’ (*upacara*) commonly called *puja*. The first *upacara* consists of calling the deity or inviting her (*avahana*) and to offer her a seat (*asana*). After purification of the priest and of one of the main ingredients of the ritual, water, the god is welcomed and made comfortable, as if he were a respected guest or a king. Water is purified (*arghya*), the feet of the deity are washed (*padya*), and some water is offered to cleanse her mouth (*acamana*). After offering light refreshment (*madhuparka*) the toilet of the deity, so to speak, begins. The image is given a bath (*snana*), is clothed (*vastra*) and invested with the sacred thread (*upavita*). The offerings are presented: sandalpaste (*gandha*), flowers (*puspa*), incense (*dhupa*), a lamp (*dipa*), something to eat (*naivedya*). Finally the worshipper bows to the Deity (*vandana*) and utters pleasing words to her. It is only after the presence of the deity in the image has been ascertained that the devotees are admitted to its presence.”<sup>14</sup>

The consequent incorporation of the god into a stone or a statue is temporary. For instance, for Red Avalokiteśvara in Pātan there are, as already emphasized, annual rites of bathing and reconsecration. The image of this god, like some of the masks, is made of clay. During the restoration of the image, the god will reside in a big silver pot.<sup>15</sup>

For two weeks the painters will clean, replaster and paint the image. According to tradition, for replastering the head of the deity, thirty-two different kinds of clay are supposed to be brought from a special quarter called Myapi, a local goddess of the town of Pātan. Myapi is a holy place listed as one of the twelve pilgrimage places (*tirtha than*) visited regularly by Newar Buddhists. At the end of the two weeks a special ceremony for the reconsecration of the image is carried out by a Buddhist priest, *vajrācārya*; the essence of the god is then transferred back from the silver, painted pot into the effigy. The ceremony of reconsecration of the image is done by a Buddhist priest, *vajrācārya*. The head of the statue is oversized, bearing little resemblance to the idealized human proportions typical of most images of *bodhisattva*. A similar ritual takes place at Jagannāth temple at Puri in Orissa. Every year is celebrated the ritual of bathing and repainting the four images of the statues of Jagannāth temple: Jagannātha, Bālabhadra, Subhadrā and Sudarśana. At Puri, the statues are made of *nīma* wood, considered to be a sacred tree. Similar rituals exist in many other parts of India when deities are re-born.

For the last twenty years the development of tourism in the Valley has led most of the local painters to make masks, paintings and even frescoes for sale to tourists. This kind of work tends to be mass produced and the paintings do not have the artistic quality they had in the past. The curio shops in Kāthmāndu, in Pātan and in all the towns of the Valley sell masks of different dimensions, and the iconographical details are very often changed. While it is easy to understand why poor artisans take part in this lucrative trade it is more difficult to perceive why tourists, who generally have no knowledge of what they are buying, are happy to acquire such objects as souvenirs.

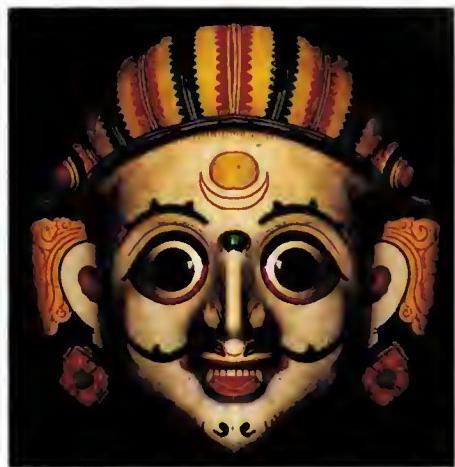


Fig. 75: Seto (Sveta) Bhairava  
(photo: Thomas Ozoux).

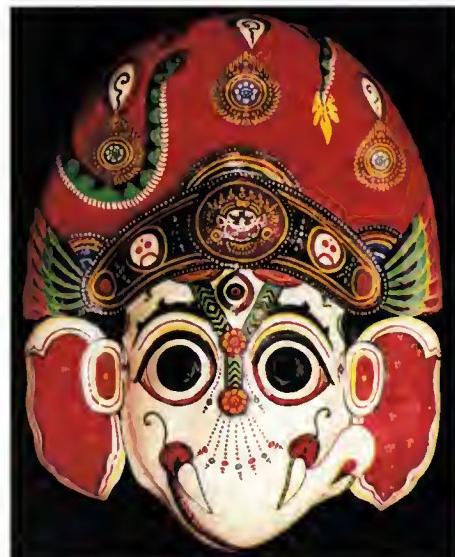


Fig. 76: Duma  
(photo: Thomas Ozoux).

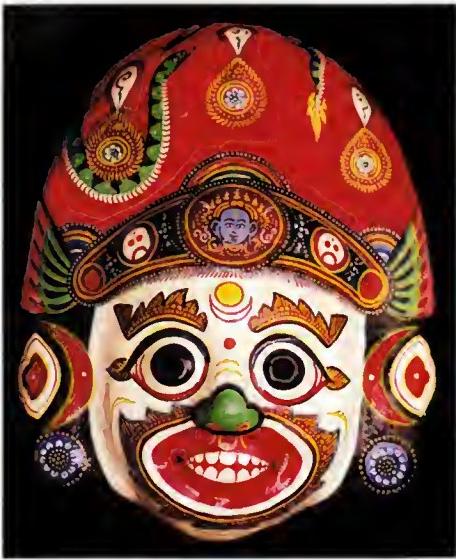


Fig. 77: Sima  
(photo: Thomas Ozoux).

## References

1. A. Vergati, 1984.
2. J. N. Banerjea, 1956, p. 82.
3. G. Toffin, 1994, p. 243: "Because they are in regular contact with statues and images of important Tantric deities which are kept hidden in private shrines, the Citrakars receive a traditional 'initiation', composed of a number of mantras, from their Vajracarya priests. Citrakar women can also receive this special 'initiation': the ceremony, which is usually collective, is not called *dekha* (*diksa*) like that of the high Newar castes, both Buddhists and Hindus, but *nhika*, term which also (and more appropriately) designates the rites which the 'initiate' must perform every morning in honour of his *aga dyah* (the god of the tantric sanctuary)."
4. G. Toffin, 1994, p. 241.
5. J. N. Banerjea, 1956, p. 566 and T. Goudrian, 1965, pp. 174-75.
6. A. Vergati, 1984. See also P. Pal, 1985, p. 181 "Book of Designs for Masks". "The eleven folios of this folding book contain designs or models for masks which are generally made of wood or papier mâché and brightly painted."
7. G. Toffin, 1994, p. 241 gives the list of the dates when paintings have to be made during festivals and other religious ceremonies. The painters also paint holy images for life-cycle rituals.
8. P. Pal, 1985, p. 155.
9. N. Gutschow, 1987, p. 141; Van den Hoek, 1992, pp. 376-77.
10. Toffin, 1996, p. 241.
11. G. Toffin, 1996, p. 244: "The fire sacrifice is called *sarpabali* or *homa*. Pigeons and sparrows are also thrown in the fire along with serpents. Two pairs of

these animals are involved. Both pairs are held right above the firepit, but only one of them is committed to the flames while the other one is set free into the air. The animal must be totally consumed by fire. According to some information this is the most important ritual of the whole festival.”

12. R. Levy, 1990, pp. 508-9.
13. For Indian parallels and contrasts with statues see J.N. Banerjea, 1956, pp. 286-88.
14. A. Eschmann, 1978, p. 81. See also Kane, 1941, II, p. 729. The sequence of the *upacāra* can differ slightly in different regions of India.
15. J. Locke, 1980, pp. 262-64.

Fig. 78: A Curio shop in Thimi, 1993 (photo: A. Vergati).



## The Person, the Mask and the God

THE first meaning of the Latin word *persona* was 'mask', a tragic mask. "The explanations of Latin etymologists that *persona* comes from *personare*, the masks through which (*per*) *resounds* the voice of the actor, is a later derivation, invented afterwards — although we do distinguish between *persona* and *persona muta*, the silent role in drama and mime."

The transformation of the notion of 'person' took place at the beginning of the Christian era. The French scholar M. Mauss has demonstrated this evolution of the term of person. "From a simple masquerade to the mask, from a 'role' (*personnage*) to a 'person' (*personne*), to a name, to an individual; from the latter to a being possessing metaphysical and moral value: from a moral consciousness to a sacred being; from the latter to a fundamental form of thought and action — the course is accomplished." At the beginning of our millennium Christians made a metaphysical entity of the moral person (*personne morale*) once they had became aware of its religious power.

Long before the Christian era, in ancient Greece, the word *prosopon* which meant mask and face underwent semantic changes: it took on the meanings of personage, role, personality, individual. For instance in writings of Polybius in the second century BC we note the first semantic

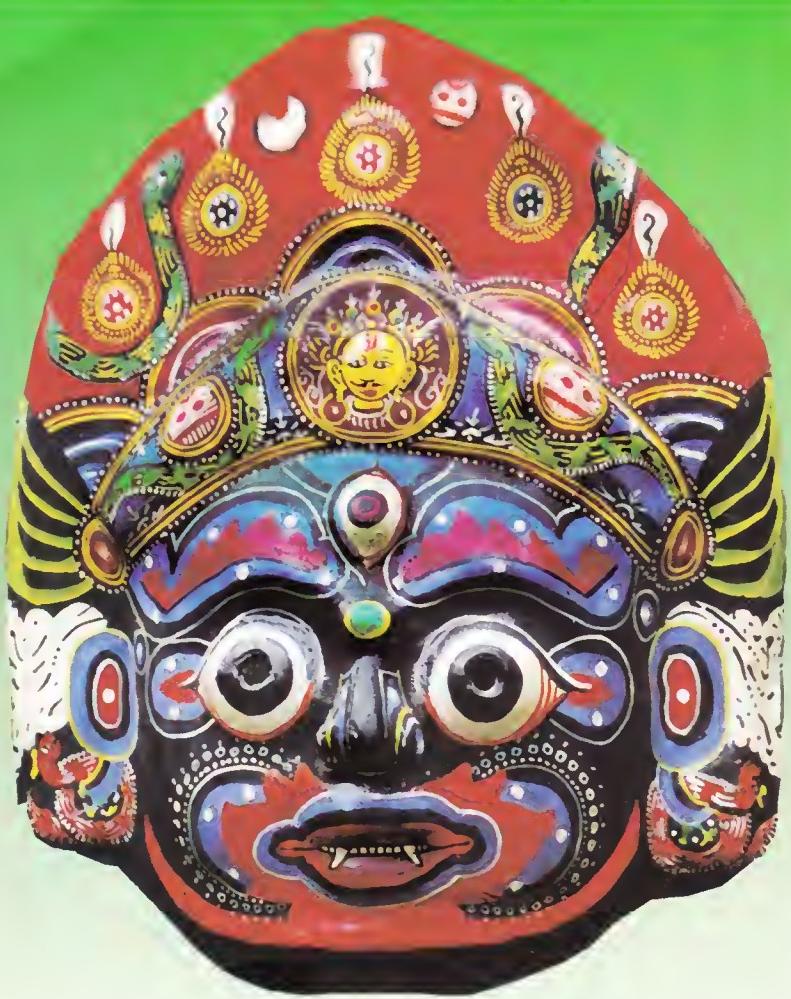


Fig. 79: Bhairava mask in *papier maché* (photo: Thomas Ozoux).

transformation of the word *prosopon*: ‘the word has the sense of literary personage’. The same author, in another text, renders *prosopon* by ‘person’ but in this instance it designates a feminine individual exceptionally robust for a member of her sex: this person was full of vigour. Again, in a work of Plutarch, the term *prosopon* is to be found with the meaning of ‘individual’. There is a mythological story which explains how the term *prosopon* took on the meaning of individual. The barber who first rushed from the Pyraeus to Athens to announce the disaster in Sicily, when challenged and questioned, admitted that he did not know the name of his

informant and attributed the origin of the rumour to an anonymous and unknown *prosopon*. In ancient Greece the term *prosopon* designated above all a person in a grammatical sense. This meaning is attested with certainty in writings of Denys the Thracian, a grammarian of the second century BC, and thus a contemporary of Polybius. “There are three persons, first, second and third. The first is that of the speaker; the second is the person whom the speaker addresses; and the third is the subject spoken of.”

In Ancient Greece two categories of masks were worn: those used at theatrical performances and those figuring in ritual dances. In the Greek pantheon Dionysius is the god of masks and is the masked god; he is, moreover, the god of the masked personages, male characters in the satirical dramas. The mask is the fundamental symbol of Dionysius. The bearded and long-haired mask which was the portable mask of the god is not only recognisable by its silhouette drawn exceptionally frontally: it had been the model which had inspired sculptures in marble of the god's effigy. The Greek authors identified Dionysius with Śiva. It may be mentioned in this connection that Megasthenes describes the Indian Dionysius as the God of hills and mountains.

The term most frequently employed in ancient Greece to designate a mask was the word used to designate a face *prosopon*. This term defines the face and the mask as 'open to the view'. The Romans, on the other hand, used the Latin word *persona* to designate a mask : this term had no link etymologically with the Latin words for 'face' which were *facies* and *vultus*. Neither of these Latin terms is connected with the notion of vision. In ancient Greece, on the contrary, the significance of masks and faces must be understood in the context of a look, a visual relationship. The term *prosopon* (mask and face) is linked to terms denoting the eye and with verbs denoting sight. A visual relationship is, for the Greeks, necessarily reciprocal. To see the face and the eyes of an other is necessarily, to be looked at by him or her. If this is not so, the absence of reciprocity takes on a significance and becomes the subject of many researches at the level of myths and representations.

It is the face which signals the identity of a god and a person. In the Himalayan context there is a

direct relationship between mask and face. The face of a deity is the most significant part of a statue and it has to be perfect. Any imperfection in an object of worship points to the need to replace it or to repair it immediately. One should not worship a statue which is damaged. The first act of the Muslims who destroyed the Buddhist monasteries in Northern India in the eleventh century was to destroy the faces of the statues. In Hinduism as in Buddhism, the face is considered as a privileged *medium* or intermediary in relationships between men and gods. "The world of masks is not a direct reflection of the real world but rather of another form of reality. It is in two senses a world 'about face'."<sup>10</sup>

In Newari, the word *khwapa* designates both 'face' and 'mask'. This same word is used for the masks worn during ritual dances. The gods which are portrayed in the form of a mask in gilt copper which decorate temples or processional chariots are also called *khwapa dyo* 'the mask of the God'. A great number of temples, for instance the Ākāśa Bhairava temple at Bhaktapur, are decorated with heads representing the face of Śiva Bhairava. A fearsome mask known in Sanskrit as *kīrttimukha*, "the face of glory", represents Śiva in his form of the Vedic god Rudra, the Wild God. "Kīrttimukha first was a special emblem of Shiva himself and a characteristic element on the lintels of Shiva temples . . . then the 'face' began to be used indiscriminately on various parts of Hindu shrines as an auspicious device to ward off evil; it is incorporated generally into decorative friezes."<sup>11</sup>

In Indian ideology the face cannot be separated from the eyes. A statue, like a painting which is an object of worship, has to be animated. In India the eyes of an image are opened during a ritual by a brāhmaṇa priest. To open the eyes of a statue is to animate it, to infuse it with life. To see the face of

god or of a goddess is necessarily to be seen by them also. To see a god implies that one has been seen. "The central act of Hindu worship, from the point of view of the lay person is to stand in the presence of the deity and to behold the image with one's own eyes, to see and to be seen by the deity . . . in the Hindu understanding the deity is present in the image, the visual apprehension of the image is charged with religious meaning. Beholding the image is an act of worship, and through the eyes one gains the blessings of the divine."

One cannot understand the rituals of Newar Buddhism without taking into account the visualization of deities (*sādhanā*) during the time of their performance. Although the form of such rites was borrowed from Hinduism, today in Nepal their content is thoroughly Buddhist. The word *sādhanā* is related etymologically to *siddha* which can be understood as 'success' or 'accomplishment' and in this sense "the term *sādhana* means the act or the means of being successful and this comes to mean in our context the ritual of incantation or evocation, or whatever particular means may be employed to win over the chosen divinity." D. Gellner's remarks about visualization in daily rituals are significant in this context: "Without it, lay Newar Buddhists would not be able to worship deities in images or ritual implements. The only complex ritual from which Visualization is absent is the regular worship of a monastery deity . . . it would not be possible to make even daily offerings to a Buddha statue without a prior Tantric Visualization, which is the central act of the 'establishment' of the image. In both scriptural and local stories which encourage lay devotion, such worship of unconsecrated images occurs; but in the actual practice of Newar Buddhism there is no worship without prior Tantric Visualization, by someone, however far in the past. Without the

motor of Visualization the whole religion would grind to a halt.”<sup>16</sup>

In Hinduism as well as in Buddhism statues are treated like human beings. They have to be fed, washed, clothed; they sleep at fixed hours. “After having bathed the image and decked it with new clothes and ornaments and worshiped it with flowers and sandal-paste, the priest should lay it down on a well-spread bed. When the image has ‘slept’ its full, it should be roused from sleep with songs and dances and should be installed at a time fixed by the astrologers. Then after worshiping the image with flowers, garments, sandal-paste and the sounds of conch-shell and trumpet, it should be carefully taken inside the sanctum from the pavilion (*mandapa*) keeping the temple to the right.” Written or printed manuals, in Nepal as in India, explain the procedures to be followed in daily rituals for worshiping divine images. The gods and goddesses represented by the group of Nava-Durgā masks die at the end of a period of eight months and they are born again four months later from their ashes. They are the only gods of the Newar pantheon who die and who are burnt like human beings.<sup>17</sup> “The gods were not immortal from the beginning. They become immortal by drinking *soma* the elixir of immortality. They were dependant on man, on *soma* and on the sacrifice.”<sup>18</sup>

The face indicates the character of the god or goddess. The facial code is figurative: it reproduces the different forms (*avatāra*) of the god. In various paintings, above all those representing *mandala*, the faces of the different gods are depicted in a very conventional manner: always round, sometimes with big eyes, a sign of Indian influence, the differences between the gods are signaled by their attributes, their ornaments, their clothes. Some of the gods, like the moon or the sun, are represented

as having a round and shining face.

As the face does to the statue, the mask gives to each dancer an individuality and an identity. The mask is also the support of a mental image of a god. It is from his mask and his costume, more precisely from the colours of the masks, that one can identify him. In his turn the dancer will identify himself with the goddess or the god he represents. This transformation begins when he puts on his costume and his particular mask. It is as a member of a dance group that he will take up his role just as the gods assume their individual roles in a complex *mandala*. His costume and mask may even transform him into a goddess. He will receive the jingling bracelets, to be worn below his knees, one month before he receives the costume and the mask. The pairs of jingling bracelets worn by eleven of the eleven dancers are seen as distinct from each other, signifying the deity they represent. When a dancer puts on the bracelets, his transformation to a god begins. Together with bracelets, the dancers receive a pair of red trousers as well as robes in the colours of their respective deities. This dress must be worn throughout the performances of the dances. The transformation of a dancer into a divinity lasts throughout one month. After a dancer receives his mask, he can be possessed by the god. When he wears a mask the dancer does not speak, he does not bow in front of any person.

The whole team of individuals engaged in the dances is designated by the term *khalak* which means family. This term is also applied to individual members of a group of relatives when they are spoken about collectively. In fact this group includes not only the dancers but also the musicians and the attendants. During a period of eight months they are considered as if they were blood relatives.

Masks or the gods represented by masks have a demoniacal aspect and are linked to Tantrism both Buddhist and Hindu. Everything which concerns a mask or a disguise is ambiguous and suggests a transformation. The position of the dancer in society is itself ambiguous: he is of low rank but is admired and even feared for the good reason that he is the vehicle of a powerful deity.

In Kāthmāndu Valley, as in ancient Greece, there is a direct relationship between the face and the mask, both being designated by the same word. The face remains the most important part of a god and also of a person to whom it gives an identity. Vision is another element which is important: there is an association of 'face' and 'eyes' and between 'face' and 'look'.

The description of the ritual of making the masks illustrates the homology which exists between the concepts of a human person as an individual and a deity in the form of a statue or a mask. Each has a body which, after a period of time, perishes: statues or masks have to be renewed every year or every twelve years. Their life span is shorter than that of humans. In turn, the life of human beings is shorter than that of gods. The formless part of a statue or a mask is called usually its 'essence' or its 'life'. So, before performing rituals for the 'renewal' of statues, both Hindus and Buddhists transfer their 'essence' or 'lives', *atman* or *jīvana*. This is often done by conserving the 'essence' in a earthen pot (*kalaśa*) which, throughout a fortnight, is kept in a temple.

When a statue is restored, repainted or when a new mask is made, its 'life' is put back into it by a specific ritual including a *mantra*. J. Locke has given the only complete description of the ritual performed for one of the main deities of the Valley: Red Avalokiteśvara: "On the day of the bathing

itself the currently officiating *vajracārya*, a *pañju* from Bungamati, performs a *kalaśa pujā* at Ta: Baha, at the conclusion of which he removes the spirit of the god from the image and places it in a large silver pot, *kalaśa*. At the *kalaśa pujā* he consecrates eight smaller silver pots of water in addition to the large one for the spirit of the god. Two of the smaller ones are used for the bathing; the other six are placed in the temple and six protective, secret (*guhya*) deities are invoked into them".<sup>21</sup> In one of the Nava Durga legends of Bhaktapur, only the Tantric priest has the 'power' to remove the 'life' or the 'essence' from the masks or to give them "life" with a *mantra*. In India the four wooden statues of Jagannāth at Puri in Orissa: Jagannātha, Bālabhadra, Subhadrā, Sudarśana are destroyed after a period of twelve years and new bodies for the statues are made, *nava kalevara*. Repainting of images is done annually which is known as *anasara* or *anavasara*.<sup>22</sup> After the carving of the wood into the shape of the statues, the most important ceremony is the consecration of the images and the transfer of the soul or 'life', *brahmapadārtha*, from the old statue to the new one.

In the case of a human person its spiritual entity or life is linked with the idea of a self which persists after the death. When renewing masks Newārs use the word 'life' and it is only a Tantric brāhmaṇa with a secret *mantra* who infuses the new masks of Nava Durgā with 'life'. Most authors have translated the word *ātman* by 'soul'. Perhaps a better rendering would be 'essence of life' or 'self', the part of the body which is never destroyed or altered. In Kāthmāndu Valley for Hindus, Viṣṇu is the deity who is supposed to reside in each individual as part of their 'self'. "He is worshiped in every house. In the ceremonies devoted to dying, attention is focused on Viṣṇu, and the dying person

must pray Viṣṇu, meditate on him, and address his or her last words to him.”

In Hinduism, the anthropomorphic gods look like human persons: they die and are reborn. The death of deities, as that of masks, involves the destruction of the old statues or masks. The masks of Nava Durgā are cremated in Bhaktapur and in Kāthmāṇdu. At Puri, the wooden statues of Jagannāth are buried. Relationship between gods are also social relationship. Masks and statues, like human beings, are subject to ritual manipulation: they live and flourish thanks to the respectful behaviour of their devotees and thanks to the ritual performed daily. The idea of the person is completely linked to notions of social structure and cosmological order. A child also becomes a social person, an individual member of a community through rituals performed (*samskāra*). A social person as part of a moral system has both rights and duties.

The rituals performed for the masks and statues shed light on another aspect of the homology between human persons and gods: in the case of both, the spirit, which is in essence formless, is periodically separated from the body, which being perishable, disappears and must be re-created, perpetually. New masks like new statues, even if they will contain a previous essence or spirit, have to be reconsecrated before they are worshiped.

Little is known about the history and the origin of the ritual dances which take place in the Kāthmāṇdu Valley. It seems however probable that the oral tradition and the chronicles of the nineteenth century which situate their origins between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries reflect reality. It is certain that in Newār Buddhism, as well as in Hinduism, Tantrism

played a major role in the iconography and in the performance of different rituals. As far as Newār Buddhism is concerned, the representation of Buddha Dipāñkara by an effigy surmounted by a mask and its procession date from the late Malla period, most probably from the seventeenth century. It is difficult to know how old are the ritual dances performed in the inner part of the Buddhist monasteries: it is forbidden for non initiated persons to see them.

When we examine the repartition of ritual dances throughout the Indian sub-continent we notice that there are no ritual dances in Central India. The use of ritual masks is more prevalent in the South, in Kerala, in the Tulu country bordering it, in the Coorg area and in Sri Lanka.<sup>1</sup> If one takes an overview of the Himālayan regions and Northern India, one sees that in Kāthmāndu Valley, where the Newārs are Hindus and Buddhists, the tradition of masked ritual dances is still perpetuated and is clearly distinct from that of masks worn during theatrical performances.

## References

1. M. Mauss, 1985, p. 15.
2. M. Mauss, 1985, p. 22. *See also* A.D. Napier, 1986, pp. 4-10 and also L. Dumont, 1985, pp. 93-123.
3. M. Mauss, 1985, p.19.
4. F. Frontisi-Ducroux, 1995, p. 57. *See also* A.D. Napier, 1986, pp.10-15.
5. F. Frontisi-Ducroux, 1995, p. 59.
6. F. Frontisi-Ducroux, 1995 ,p. 50.
7. J.N. Banerjee, 1969, p. 71.
8. F. Frontisi-Ducroux, 1995, pp. 16-17.
9. F. Frontisi-Ducroux, 1995, p. 25.

10. J. Mack, 1996, p. 31.
11. H. Zimmer, 1946, 181: "Kirttimukha appears also in Shiva's crown of matted hair — presumably in accordance with another version of the story where the monster was rewarded by being inserted into Shiva's locks. In this position it developed into an ornamental finial for the upper decoration of images, and came thence to figure at the summit of the aureole (*prabha-mandala*) the so-called 'Gate of Splendors' (*prabha torana*) at the back of images."
12. Banerjee, 1956, p. 566. *See also* R. Gombrich, 1966, pp. 23-36. T. Goudrian, 1965, pp. 174-75: chapter "The opening of the eyes".
13. D. Eck, 1981, p. 53.
14. F.J. Locke, 1980, pp. 105-21. He writes: "the rituals of the *vajracarya* can only be understood if one realizes their original purpose in the acting out in ritual of the sadhana."
15. D. Snellgrove, 1987, p. 130. "The word 'adept' (from Latin *adeptus* 'attained') translates fairly well the Sanskrit term *siddha* which is perfect participle of the root *sidh* meaning 'to succeed' or 'to be accomplished'...."
16. D. Gellner, 1992, p. 290.
17. J.N. Banerjee, 1956, pp. 566-67; *see also* C. Clementin Ojha, 1990, pp. 119-22 *see also* Assayag, J., 1992, pp. 393-409 gives a detailed description of the ceremonies performed daily in the temple of the goddess Yelamma (Renuka) in her temple Saundatti (North Karnataka).
18. In India, the demoness Holikā is cremated. Holikā supposedly fireproofed by devotion to her demon father, King Harnakas, had been burned alive in the fiery destruction plotted by her to punish her brother Prahlāda for his stubborn devotion to the true god, Rama. See Kane, 1958, Vol. V, 237-239.

19. S. Kramrisch, 1981, p. 104 “Sacrifices are the food by which gods live. Man provides the food by which gods live. Man provides the food; by sacrificing he consecrates himself.”
20. Van der Hoek, 1992, p. 376. *See also* G. Toffin, 1996, p. 249.
21. F.J. Locke, 1980, p. 262.
22. D. Pathy, *The Art of Renewal. Navakalevara Ritual in the Puri Jagannātha Temple* MSS. 1997. p. 2 “The first half of *āśādha* starting from the day following the great bathing festival on the full moon day (*pūrṇimā*) of the month of *jyestha* is used every year for the repainting of the discoloured images and for making necessary annual repairs on them. During this period (*anavasara*) the sanctum is closed and the people may not have the *darśana* who are popularly believed to be ‘sick’. *Anasara patis* or *pata* paintings of the deities in their iconic forms are hung on a bamboo partition wall in the sanctum and worshiped. . . The period of sickness of the deities (*anavasara*) thus extends itself to three fortnights and thus gives sufficient time to the temple to construct new wooden images and to consecrate them before the temple is reopened on the the first day of the bright half of the regular *āśādha* to make preparations for the *rathayātrā* chariot festival which starts form the next day.”
23. G. C. Tripathi, 1978, pp. 233-264.
24. R. Levy, 1992, p. 215.
25. G. Tarabout, 1986, pp. 617-633.



Fig. 80: Dances of '*cham*', Guru Padmasambhava, Zhechen monastery, Nepal (photo: K. Buffetrille).

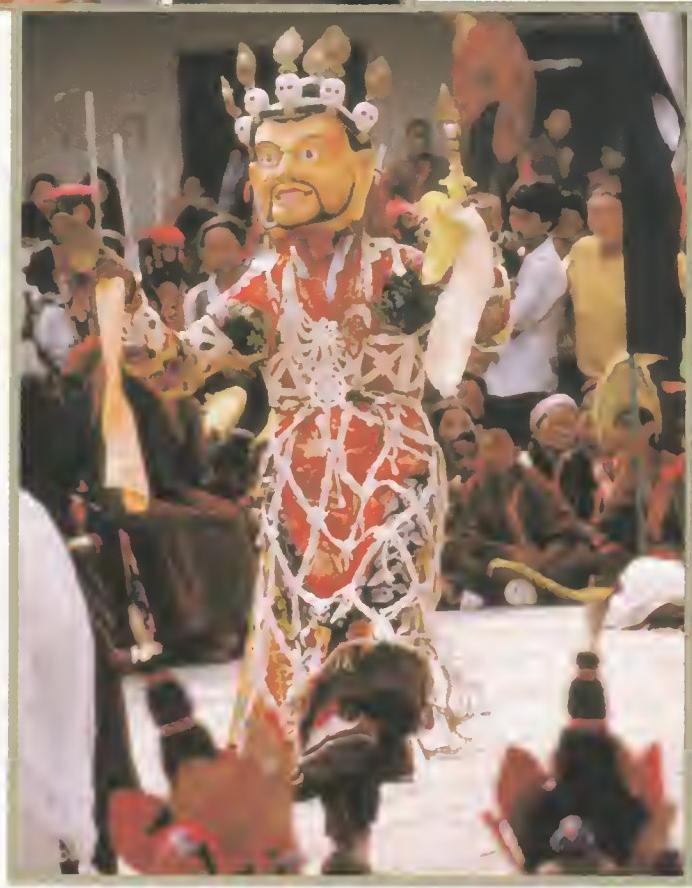


Fig. 81: A dancer performing in a '*cham*' dances at Zhechen Monastery, Bodnath, Nepal (photo: K. Buffetrille).



Fig. 82: Dance of '*cham*', Guru Padmasambhava, Zhechen monastery, Bodnath, Nepal (photo: K. Buffetrille).



Fig. 83: Dances of '*cham*, *sbrub chen*, "great realizer", Zhechen monastery, Bodnath (photo: K. Buffetrille).



Fig. 84: Dance of '*cham*, Zhechen monastery, Bodnath (photo: K. Buffetrille).

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